

[DfE's benchmarking tools for schools improve financial management](#)

The schools financial benchmarking service

The schools financial benchmarking service is a public-facing tool that everyone from school business professionals, to governors and parents can use to support school resource management. It allows users to compare a school's spending with that of other schools and trusts, and to contact those with similar characteristics to share information and learning.

River Learning Trust

River Learning Trust has grown rapidly over the last seven years with on average four new schools joining a year. It now comprises almost 30 schools including some sponsor schools which joined in a challenging financial position.

In 2018, their three-year projection showed that they would be looking at a sharp reduction of the overall reserves, leading to a substantial deficit in some schools. They wanted to establish a culture of financial efficiency across all their schools, making them accountable for their future spending. This included ensuring efficient staffing deployment, while keeping staffing costs to a maximum of 78% of income (except in exceptional circumstances) and keeping sufficient funding for learning resources and premises spending. The remaining balance would support investment in areas that would have a long-term effect on the education of the pupils.

The Trust introduced the ICFP process to all schools and used the schools financial benchmarking self-assessment dashboard to review each of the school's budgets to highlight systemic overspending. The Trust brought the finance, governance, and school improvement teams together to implement a shared goal and to instigate an action plan to reduce costs efficiently and effectively.

The Trust saw real benefit by making sure that all governors were trained to understand ICFP and able to use the benchmarking site, meaning that they could make well-informed decisions and hold school management to account appropriately. The Trust also familiarised staff at various levels with the tools, creating an improved culture of financial awareness, and efficiency, whilst maintaining and improving student outcomes.

This early and interactive budgeting process was further enhanced recently with the development of the Trust's own ICFP tool and the appointment of a curriculum planning adviser allowing greater consistency and monitoring at Trust level.

“Our Trust has improved its financial position through this process with the support of both ICFP and schools financial benchmarking tools, but also by ensuring that the diagnostic is used at the early planning stage and followed up by actions, with active engagement of all stakeholders. All the schools that were in deficit are now recovering and gradually building their target reserve. The ICFP process allowed redirection of resources to meet strategic and educational priorities, in particular to top up high needs funding, invest in IT and build central capacity and expertise while preserving a broad and balanced curriculum.”

Benedicte Yue, chief financial officer, River Learning Trust.

View my financial insights (VMFI)

The view my financial insights (VMFI) tool provides more nuanced school-specific insights. VMFI sits behind a password, meaning it can tailor the information so users can instantly identify areas of their spending that they should investigate further. For example, the tool produces a prioritised list of areas to investigate based on comparisons with the 30 most similar schools nationally and pulls this together in one place for trusts and local authorities. It then matches the data with relevant advice, guidance and commercial frameworks offered by DfE to help schools spend their resources efficiently.

One finance director found:

“I have used the VMFI tool with governors and finance committee to spot opportunities for financial improvements, specifically in checking cost categories where there might be over or underspending. To be able to share this information in graph format was a lot easier for some of the non-financial governors to understand how economical the school had been on spending compared to others in the comparable category. It was also a very good tool to use to compare to local schools in the same area who have the same funding per pupil as ourselves. This gave a better understanding of expenditure outcomes compared with those who were in areas with more funding than our authority.

Continued support from the VMFI tool by supplying the data to compare against is essential for understanding how areas in a school can be improved, either by increasing spend against certain areas or trying to decrease spending. Being able to compare against other similar schools to ourselves is already helping reassure the trust and the governors that in the main the school is spending its budget in the correct way.”

You can access these tools at:

If you have any questions, you can contact the [School Resource Management team](#).

Schools save money with DfE IT frameworks

Brigantia Learning Trust

There are currently 5 academies within the trust which caters for children aged between 2 and 19.

Simeon Cornelius, senior operations officer of Brigantia Learning Trust, was considering a cloud-based management information system (MIS) to manage the services needed across the Trust. This was not available with the current supplier.

The Trust used the Crown Commercial Service framework website to go through the procurement process and write the specification. Based on the requirements only one supplier was needed, and a contract was awarded for 2 years, with an option to extend for a year.

The Trust was paying around £110k a year for their service. The new contract value is approximately £50k a year, delivering a significant saving. There is an implementation cost, which the trust expects to recover within 2yrs. For example in one academy alone the new IT system reduces running costs from £50k to £16k per year.

The Trust found the procurement process simple and straightforward. Time was saved using the quick and easy tender process.

“The process was frighteningly simple compared to others.”

Simeon Cornelius, senior operations officer, Brigantia Learning Trust

The new service will result in the IT technical resource being able to focus on their job and there will be significant time saved from having a group wide information system.

The Sea View Trust

Nicola Chester, chief operating officer at The Sea View Trust, was keen to improve efficiency by moving to a single, cloud-based MIS.

She utilised DfE’s G-Cloud 12 framework and, having reviewed demonstrations and quotes from two suppliers, made an informed decision to secure a new contract.

“The framework was almost too easy; I kept doubting myself. I was confident as all compliance checks had been done.”

Nicola Chester, Chief Operating Officer, The Sea View Trust

The annual cost is around the same as the previous contract and includes the initial set-up cost of £10k. The benefits are an improved upgraded system that includes all the schools across the Trust. Time savings for gathering information will be significant as everything is now stored in one place and will not require telephone calls to each school.

The Trust felt that the framework was quick and easy to use and have confidence that the contract is compliant.

Maritime Academy Trust

The chief operating officer (COO) at the Trust was keen to ensure that the IT systems were updated and after checking the ‘Buying for schools’ guide on GOV.UK, contacted Everything ICT to request an independent audit.

Everything ICT reviewed the needs of each school and then went out to tender. They managed the whole process start-to-finish, adding value and challenging some aspects to ensure the trust got what was needed.

“Because we have Everything ICT, we don’t currently need an IT Lead.”

Susan Matheson, COO, Maritime Academy Trust

The Trust felt that the procurement process went very smoothly. As a result of the support they received from Everything ICT they now have a robust IT system using Google which allows very effective collaboration between schools, which wasn’t possible before.

Overall costs remained in line with earlier IT spend. However, the better system meant that all staff could easily move to working from home during the coronavirus COVID-19 restrictions. The Trust also now feels they have a strong IT maintenance contract across all schools ensuring the system is running effectively.

You can access all of the DfE-approved frameworks at:

If you have any questions, contact the [Schools Commercial Team](#).

Schools save time and money with DfE cleaning frameworks

The college needed to procure a new cleaning contract across two large sites.

They worked with the DfE to navigate an OJEU tender process and procure a new cleaning contract. The procurement consultant worked with the premises manager to create bespoke evaluation criteria to source the best possible provision, in terms of quality and value for money.

“The support was invaluable at a time when I was responsible for getting the site ready for reopening after the initial coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown. The process was straightforward and required significantly less time than I expected. I had a lead contact that I worked with who was always available, took time to ensure that each step was clear and prompted me to ensure that my target timeline was achieved. This is a service I recommend and I shall use it again in the future.”

Scott Fry, Premises Manager, Exmouth Community College

The new contract delivers a significant saving of £31,199 in year one and £89,888 over the full contract term compared with the incumbent supplier. There is no reduction in staff hours and site staff received pay rises in excess of 15% at the contract start with additional increases budgeted throughout the contract term.

Additional benefits include transparent pricing, use of client proposed monthly KPIs (not supplier proposed) and outsourcing of pension risks. Also the premises manager is now more familiar with the procurement process and feels confident in managing the contract.

Sherburn, Tadcaster and Rural (STAR) multi-academy trust

STAR multi-academy trust contains 11 schools and is located in Tadcaster. The existing cleaning contract was due for renewal and the Trust knew this would be a complex and high value contract to procure. They were also keen to secure a framework that would retain the current supplier.

Having looked at various sources, a proposal was put together for all frameworks and put before the Trust board for consideration. Having chosen to use the DfE approved YPO framework, a contact was immediately provided to support the Trust's operations and compliance manager, Louise Northrop-Clay, through the tender process.

“I've not used a framework before and struggled to understand how it worked.

From the start YPO were very open and friendly. To have this support behind the scenes was excellent.”

Louise Northrop-Clay, operations and compliance manager

Louise worked with YPO to create a competition document that encompassed the compliant terms and conditions of the framework, but also included additional questions to understand who the provider would be and meet the bespoke requirements for the school. Meetings were set up providing the opportunity to ask questions and see what the providers were like in order to ensure a more rounded tender, personalised to the school.

“Frameworks are there to give that confidence and know that due diligence has been done. Being able to use further competition to adjust it to meet our specific needs was an added advantage. A school buyer can feel isolated and the DfE webinars are great little lifelines and so useful.”

Louise Northrop-Clay, operations and compliance manager

The new contract commenced 1 April 2021 and though it is more expensive than the previous one it is demonstrating added value. The company is local, listens to what people say and support is there for the staff. Cleaners are an extremely important part of the school and have a big impact on how the school functions and how it is perceived.

Brigantia Trust

The Trust was keen to consolidate the cleaning contract across their five schools. They chose the DfE approved YPO framework. A £1.2 million three-year contract with the option to extend for one year was procured.

“The support throughout the tender process was invaluable at what was an extremely busy time for a small trust.”

Simon Cornelius, senior operations officer, Brigantia Trust

The trust felt that the time saved by a number of staff across all sites was invaluable, as freeing up time for core staff was one of the biggest reasons to outsource. They felt that working with YPO and the support they offered ensured a specification and ultimately a contract that fully met the needs of the Trust.

You can access all of the DfE-approved frameworks at:

If you have any questions, you can contact the [Schools Commercial Team](#).

Change of British High Commissioner to Lesotho: Harry MacDonald

Press release

Mr Harry MacDonald has been appointed British High Commissioner to the Kingdom of Lesotho in succession to Ms Anne Macro.



Mr Harry MacDonald has been appointed British High Commissioner to the Kingdom of Lesotho in succession to Ms Anne Macro who will be transferring to another Diplomatic Service appointment. Mr MacDonald will take up his appointment during September 2022.

Curriculum vitae

Full name: Harry MacDonald

Year	Role
2019 to present	Kinshasa, Deputy Head of Mission
2018 to 2019	FCO, Full Time Language Training (French)
2015 to 2018	Jakarta, Counsellor, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Politics and Security
2014	FCO, Counter-Daesh Task Force, Multilateral Lead
2009 to 2014	UK Mission to the United Nations in Vienna, First Secretary
2008 to 2009	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Assistant Head, Debt Management and Banking Strategy
2007	FCO, Law Enforcement Policy and Programme Lead, Afghan Drugs Unit
2005 to 2006	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Strategic Projects Adviser
2004 to 2005	Her Majesty's Treasury, Policy Adviser, Environment and Transport
2003 to 2004	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Policy Adviser

Further information

All the latest news is available on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office page of the gov.uk website at: www.gov.uk/fcdo

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[Look, no hands! Watch as dangerous drivers are caught on film by officers in unmarked HGV](#)

In new footage released today, a van driver is seen talking on his phone and looking at his sat nav as he travels along the A500 in Stoke-on-Trent. He transfers the phone to his left hand and picks up a drink in his right hand, leaving just two fingers on the wheel.

But he then takes both hands completely off the wheel to put down his drink and move the phone back to his right hand.

Still chatting away on his phone, the driver remains oblivious to the fact he is being filmed as he takes the exit off the A500 – followed by police travelling behind who had been alerted by officers in the National Highways HGV cab.

[Driver caught driving with phone in one hand and drink in another](#)

In a second clip, a lorry driver has both of his hands in a tobacco pouch and then rolls a cigarette as he drives along the M40 in Warwickshire before looking over to see the camera rolling in the HGV next to him.

[Look no hands! Driver seen rolling a cigarette while driving a HGV on the motorway](#)

Other footage shows the moment a driver who is not wearing his seatbelt is spotted by Warwickshire Police. He was followed off the motorway by police officers travelling behind and dealt with.

[Careless driver caught not wearing his seatbelt at the wheel by police](#)

These are the latest in over 28,000 offences which have been recorded by officers in the Operation Tramline HGV cabs since the national safety initiative was launched by National Highways to support its partners in roads policing.

The unmarked HGV cabs are now being used as part of a multi-agency Week of Action on the M6, taking place from Monday 13 June to Sunday 19 June, which aims to reduce the number of incidents on the motorway.

The campaign takes place along the length of the M6, the longest motorway in the country, and so has been labelled Operation Vertebrae.

National Highways deals with almost 180 reported incidents on the M6 every day. These include a large number of traffic collisions with 3,484 reported on the M6 in 2021 – despite the impact of lockdown at the start of the year.

More than 28,100 offences have been recorded by police partners in Operation Tramline since its launch in 2015. The most common offences are not wearing a seatbelt (8,375); using a mobile phone (7,163) and not being in proper control of a vehicle (2,083).

National Highways Head of Road Safety, Jeremy Phillips, said:

Through this week of action we want to make all of our roads safer by raising awareness and encouraging motorists to consider their driving behaviour – not only on the M6 but on all of our roads.

Working together with our road safety partners, we are spreading our safety messages and raising awareness that those who put themselves and others at risk can expect to be spotted. Operation Tramline enables our partners in enforcement agencies to identify that high-risk minority and take action to bring their behaviours in line with the safe and law-abiding majority.

The types of behaviour identified are typically those of a minority of motorists and whilst the number of people still using their mobile phone at the wheel or not wearing a seatbelt is disappointing, thanks to the Tramline HGVs we've been able to stop people who could have caused serious harm on the road.

From their elevated viewpoint in the unmarked HGV cabs, police officers are able to spot people driving dangerously – whatever vehicle they may be in. Consequences for drivers range from warnings to fixed penalty notices, court summons or arrest.

Five forces are taking part in Operation Vertebrae – Lancashire, Merseyside, Cheshire, Warwickshire Police and Central Motorway Police Group, as well as the North West Commercial Vehicle Unit and local road safety partnerships.

In addition to the HGV cab patrols, partners taking part in the M6 week of action will be present at motorway services offering advice to drivers and carrying out vehicle checks. Among those taking part at motorway services will be the DVSA, Health and Safety Executive, HMRC, the Home Office and Immigration Enforcement.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Roads Policing Operations, Commander

Kyle Gordon, said:

We have collaborated with National Highways on the Operation Tramline roads safety initiative for many years. We all recognise that being distracted while driving increases the risk of a collision and the potential to leave families and communities devastated, particularly with the sheer size and weight of some of the larger vehicles on our roads. We really welcome the opportunity to identify any driver who would put themselves and others at risk by being distracted, it is totally unacceptable.

David Collings, DVSA's Head of Enforcement Delivery, said:

DVSA's priority is to protect everyone from unsafe drivers and vehicles.

We always welcome the opportunity to support other agencies with our enforcement teams' wide-ranging expertise. By using the latest technology and techniques we can target drivers and vehicles who pose the greatest risk to road safety.

This week of action alongside our partners will help drivers, operators and businesses better understand what they can do to help keep our roads safe.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.