

Integrated curriculum and financial planning overview

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Introduction

This guidance is intended to support trust executive and governance leaders with the basics of integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP).

The guidance introduces some of the common approaches, metrics, and tools used in integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP). It does not endorse a single model and should be read alongside the DfE's [ICFP guidance](#), its [financial benchmarking and insights tool](#), and relevant sector resources.

What is integrated curriculum and financial planning?

At its simplest, ICFP is a formula or set of calculations that can help your trust model the financial requirements of your curriculum offer. Using a set of assumptions on things like pupil to teacher ratio, teacher costs, and expected income, trusts can quickly estimate their costs and understand what changes to them might mean for future budgets. It can also help identify outliers between similar schools – both in terms of what is working and what could be better.

While the principles can be used across all schools, some of the values used in the formula will vary between schools – for example, secondary schools typically receive more funding per pupil than primary schools, so you will usually need to adjust the figures to match your context.

Different ICFP models use different approaches, reflecting underlying assumptions about what factors are most important. In this guidance we do not delve into those assumptions, and while we give examples they are just that – your trust will need to consider its own context and the appropriate benchmarks to use.

These tools work best when used as a starting point. There may be good reasons why a particular school might vary compared to average ICFP calculations – identifying these differences can help you as trust leaders to understand the context and provide appropriate support.

It is important to compare like with like so far as possible, and the aim is not necessarily to have all schools align at the same benchmark – rather to understand why there are differences and whether those variations have lessons that can help the trust as a whole to improve.

Integrated curriculum and financial planning or curriculum-led financial planning?

We use the term integrated curriculum and financial planning or ICFP throughout this guidance, reflecting the terminology used by the Department for Education.

You may sometimes see this referred to as curriculum-led financial planning (CLFP), but the underlying principle is the same: bringing curriculum, workforce, and financial planning together so that educational ambitions and available resources are considered as part of a single strategic conversation.



CLFP was developed as a concept by Outwood Grange Academies Trust and variations on it have since been widely adopted as a useful tool across the sector.

About example data used in this guidance

The figures used in this guidance are intended as examples only, and may not reflect current funding or best practice. They do not represent the full range of funding, costs, and approaches used in schools of different types.

Your trust should consider your own appropriate benchmarks, taking into account the trust's context, phase, curriculum model, pupil characteristics, geography, and strategic priorities.

If you have schools or different phases or types then you may have several sets of calculations that reflect differences in income, costs, and operating practices.



Principles for good financial planning

Our principles of good financial planning are:

1. Financial planning should be led by organisational and curriculum design – curriculum is the core business of any school or trust and the school or trust should be clear about its curriculum ambition;
2. Efficiency, probity and ethics in the use of public funds are first and foremost about public sector values – the [seven principles of public life](#) should guide us at all times;
3. Schools and trusts should seek to achieve the best possible educational and wider social outcomes through the economic, efficient and effective use of resources;
4. Tools for strategic financial planning, including ICFP, are first and foremost about being in control of spending decisions – it is primarily about where we spend and how we invest public money, not where we cut.

The [Academy trust handbook](#) (ATH) states that the trust board must ensure that budgets, for the current year and beyond are compiled accurately, based on realistic assumptions including any provision being made to sustain capital assets, and reflect lessons learned from previous years. It also encourages boards to take an integrated approach to curriculum and financial planning.

The *Handbook* requires the accounting officer to complete and sign a statement on regularity, propriety and compliance each year and submit it with the audited accounts. This is a formal declaration by the trust's accounting officer that they have met their personal responsibilities to Parliament for the resources under their control during the year.

It includes a responsibility to ensure that:

- there is efficient and effective use of resources (value for money)
- public money is spent for the purposes intended by Parliament (regularity)
- appropriate standards of conduct, behaviour and corporate governance are maintained when applying the funds under their control (propriety)

The format of the statement is included within DfE's [academy accounts direction](#). A review of the accounting officer's statement must be included within the remit of academy trusts' external auditors.



A financial model: What we can afford

As a first step, the school or trust needs to understand what is affordable. For a trust, this calculation can be done for each school in the group. A good place to start is ASCL's financial model.

This formula uses the following inputs:

- ATC: average teacher costs
- I: revenue funding per pupil
- Pt: proportion of funding spent on teachers
- NOR: number on roll

The calculation has two stages, first calculating a pupil teach ratio (PTR) and then using that to calculate a teacher headcount:

$$PTR = ATC / (I \times Pt)$$

$$\text{Number of FTE teachers we can afford} = NOR / PTR$$

Worked example

This example uses the following input figures:

- ATC (average teacher costs): £45,000
- I (revenue funding per pupil): £4,500
- Pt (proportion of funding spent on teachers): 60%
- NOR (number on roll): 1,200

$$PTR = 45,000 / (4,500 \times 0.6) = 16.67$$

$$NOR / PTR = 1,200 / 16.67 = 71.9 \text{ FTE teachers}$$

In this example, based on the average costs and overheads and taking into account income, the school would be able to afford 71.9 FTE teachers.



Curriculum-led approaches: What could we do?

Finance-led and curriculum-led are two different approaches. CST would advocate applying a curriculum-led approach and then flexing this if required if finances allow.

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy approach

This formula uses the following inputs:

- PTR = pupil teach ratio
- C: contact ratio
- ACS: average class size
- NOR: number on roll

The calculation has two stages, first calculating a pupil teach ratio (PTR) and then using that to calculate a teacher headcount:

$$PTR = C \times ACS$$

$$\text{Number of FTE teachers needed} = NOR / PTR$$

Worked example

This example uses the following input figures:

- C (contact ratio): 0.79
- ACS (average class size):
- NOR (number on roll): 1,200

$$PTR = 0.79 \times 25 = 19.75$$

$$NOR / PTR = 1,200 / 19.75 = 60.75 \text{ FTE teachers}$$

In this example, the school can deliver a curriculum with 60.75 FTE teachers.

The Outwood Grange Academies Trust approach

This model uses a more complex formula, and also includes a school's senior team. The inputs are:

- NOR: numbers on roll
- BCS: benchmark class size
- P: periods in a week/ cycle
- CB: curriculum bonus (this is a theoretical measure of the amount of extra curriculum time/by way of periods, allocated to a student population above the notional basic provision to achieve targeted group sizes smaller than the benchmark class size)
- CR: contact ratio for teachers

The calculation has three stages, first calculating the number of sessions and the teacher load, and then the number of teachers needed to deliver it.



$$SESSIONS = (NOR / BCS) \times P \times CB$$

$$TL = CR \times P$$

$$\text{Number of FTE teachers needed (including principal and senior team)} = SESSIONS / TL$$

Once the number of teachers needed to deliver the curriculum on these metrics has been established, the school then enters an iterative process to see if it can afford this number of teachers.

By reducing the curriculum bonus or increasing the staffing contact ratio (giving a higher average teacher load), this will reduce the number of teachers needed. Conversely, increasing the curriculum bonus or decreasing the staffing contact ratio (giving a lower average teacher load), will increase the number of teachers needed.

Worked example

This example uses the following input figures:

- NOR (number on roll): 1,200
- BCS (benchmark class size): 27
- P (periods in a week): 25
- CB (curriculum bonus): 8% (giving a multiplier of 1.08)
- CR (staffing contact ratio): 0.79

$$(1,200 / 27) \times 25 \times 1.08 = 1,200 \text{ sessions}$$

$$TL = 0.79 \times 25 = 19.75$$

$$1,200 \text{ sessions} / 19.75 = 60.75 \text{ FTE (Including principal and senior team)}$$

In this example, the school can deliver a curriculum for Y7–11 pupils with 60.75 FTE teachers and senior staff.



Summary of the metrics

These approaches use different metrics and have different rationales. They are 'blunt' in the sense that they are context-independent, but they are a useful starting place for discussion, enabling principals and other senior leaders to understand and remain in control of financial planning.

Very cautiously, there are some benchmarks which schools and trusts may want to consider, bearing in mind that ICFP is first and foremost about organisational design and being in control of spending decisions – there is not an absolute or definitive value for any of the ICFP metrics. Local contextual factors are a very important consideration here.

Measure	Reference figure
ACS/BCS = average class size	25 (The Outwood model assumes a BCS of 27 x curriculum bonus of 1.08 = 25, which is the ACS assumption made in the CIPFA model)
ATC = average teacher costs	£45,000 – though there will be variation here as staffing contexts vary, and this will change each year
P = periods per week/ cycle	Context dependent
C = contact ratio	0.79 (ASCL's benchmark is 0.78 but for schools in challenging circumstances this may need to be lower still to cater for high SEND. This will also be impacted if there are high number of ECTs)
Curriculum bonus (Outwood model only)	8% or 1.08. This varies depending on context of the academy, potentially ranging from 2% to 12%. Historically, Outwood has used 8% as starting point.
I = revenue funding per pupil	Varies by school. Although the National Funding Formula sets a framework this is altered by various funding factors (such as deprivation) and may be further adjusted at local authority level.
NOR = number on roll	Context dependent
Pt = proportion of funding spent on teachers	60% (some analysis shows this dropping to 58% which shifts the PTR to 17.24)
PTR = pupil teach ratio	Varies, but usually between 19.75 at the upper end and 17.24 at a lower limit
TI = Teacher load	19.75, but will vary according to contact ratio

The difference between the finance-led and the curriculum-led approaches is quite stark.

- ASCL: The school can afford 71.9 FTE teachers
- CIPFA and Outwood: the school can deliver a curriculum with 60.75 FTE teachers

These are of course theoretical differences determined largely by the assumptions in terms of metrics for each calculation. Every school's metrics and context will be different. However, the difference between affordability and efficiency is the starting point for a discussion and may release capacity for work such as school improvement, facilities improvements, or financial recovery.



Linking affordability and efficiency: the Institute of School Business Leadership approach

The approach used by the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL) uses a range of financial and staffing metrics to assess affordability, workforce deployment, and the sustainability of the staffing model being used. It incorporates standard income and expenditure measures and covers many of the elements found in other sector approaches, while also supporting schools and trusts to meet DfE reporting requirements.

The approach uses 12 key metrics that provide school and trust leaders with a structured way to analyse the affordability, deployment, and sustainability of staffing expenditure plans. There are six key metrics:

1. Pupil-teacher ratio
2. Pupil-adult ratio
3. Teacher contact ratio
4. Average class size
5. Average teacher cost
6. Vital per lesson cost

In addition, there are six staffing metrics:

1. Total teaching staff costs as a percentage of total revenue income
2. Curriculum staff costs
3. Non-curriculum staff costs
4. All staff costs as a percentage of total revenue income
5. Senior Leadership costs as a percentage of total teaching costs
6. Management costs (including middle management) as a percentage of total teaching costs.

Calculating and interpreting these 12 key metrics can help leaders analyse staffing deployment and identify areas for further investigation. The metrics provide a useful evidence base for discussions between executive leaders, governors and trustees about workforce strategy, curriculum delivery, affordability, and educational and financial sustainability.

This includes answering such questions as:

- Is the deployment of the teaching staff efficient to deliver our curriculum?
- Can we afford the numbers and balance of teachers and leaders we have?
- Is the amount and distribution of leadership capacity appropriate and efficient?
- Can we afford the management structures we have in place or are planning?
- Do we have an appropriate balance of administrative, site and other staff?
- Have we an appropriate but efficient curriculum staffing structure to support students?
- Are we using the teaching time available to its best effect?



This approach offers a number of ways to quantify efficiency. This example focuses on two of the metrics, the pupil-teacher ratio and the teacher contact ratio.

The inputs are:

- TLPU: Teacher Loading Periods Used – the actual total teaching periods being taught in school
- T: Total teacher FTE
- TC: Periods in the timetable cycle
- NOR = Number of pupils on roll

These can be used to identify and compare two of the key metrics:

$$\text{Teacher Contact Ratio} = \text{TLPU} / (\text{TC} \times \text{T})$$

$$\text{Pupil-Teacher Ratio} = \text{NOR} / \text{T}$$

Worked example

This example uses the following example input figures:

- TLPU (Teaching Loading Periods Used) = 1305
- T (total teacher FTE) = 72.5
- TC (periods in the timetable cycle): 25 periods

$$\text{Teacher Contact Ratio} = 1305 \times (25 \times 72.5) = 0.72$$

$$\text{Pupil Teacher Ratio} = 1200 / 72.5 = 16.55$$

By comparing across schools, this might indicate a higher or lower than average ratio. It is important to note this does not mean the staffing is 'wrong' – there may be good reasons why a school operates differently. The aim is to identify areas for further investigation and assurance.



Further resources

This guide only gives an introduction to ICFP, and a sample of the models available. Further information is available from a number of sources including:

- Department for Education: [Integrated curriculum and financial planning \(ICFP\)](#)
- Institute of School Business Leadership: [What is ICFP?](#)

The DfE guide linked above includes free basic tools to explore ICFP. Commercial platforms offering ICFP tools that may integrate with your existing management software include:

- IMP Software: [Understanding integrated curriculum financial planning](#)
- School Business Services: [What is ICFP and why it's a game-changer for MATs](#)
- Access Group: [Integrated curriculum financial planning](#)





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