

Academy Helpdesk

At Price Bailey, all of our Academy clients have access to our Academy Helpdesk.

We offer this service for **free**, by phone or by email, if we either know or should know the answer to your query (and our experience is such that this is no longer confined to just financial and reporting matters).

As much as you need and as often as you like, for all external and internal audit clients.

If you are an existing client and have any academy related queries, **please contact:**

academy.helpdesk@pricebailey.co.uk

We saved our clients

£4,600

in advisory fees during Q3 2025

Take a look at some of the key topics our Helpdesk covered below during Q3 July - September 2025.

Role of the audit and risk committee

The remit of an academy trust's audit committee is to oversee internal and external audits, review the academy trust's internal control framework, ensure risk management is effective, and report to the full governing board on financial and non-financial risks.

Many academy trusts integrate the responsibilities of this committee with those of the finance committee; however, it is important to ensure that the audit and risk committee's remit is appropriately discharged.



FAQs

Q: Is an audit and risk committee required?

A: Yes. The DfE Academy Trust Handbook states an academy trust must establish an audit and risk committee, appointed by the board. Academy trusts with an annual revenue income over £50 million (based on their last audited accounts) must have a dedicated audit and risk committee. Other academy trusts must either have a dedicated audit and risk committee or can combine it with another committee, such as finance. The committee must have written terms of reference.

Q: What are the committee's responsibilities in relation to internal scrutiny?

A: The committee must:

- oversee and approve the academy trust's programme of internal scrutiny;
- ensure that risks are being addressed appropriately; and
- report to the full governing board on the adequacy of the academy trust's internal control framework, including financial and non-financial controls and management of risks.

Q: How often should the committee meet?

A: The audit and risk committee should meet at least 3 times a year.

Q: Can anyone be a member of the committee?

A: Employees of the academy trust should not be audit and risk committee members, but the accounting officer and chief financial officer should attend to provide information and participate in discussions. Where the audit and risk committee is combined with another committee, employees should not participate as members when audit matters are discussed.

Q: What are the committee's responsibilities in relation to external audit?

A: The committee must:

- review the external auditor's plan each year
- review the annual report and accounts
- review the auditor's findings and actions taken by academy trust's management in response to those findings
- assess the effectiveness and resources of the external auditor
- report the committee's conclusions annually to the board of trustees and members, including recommendations on the reappointment or dismissal or retendering of the external auditor, and their remuneration.

Sustainability

The DfE has made its expectations clear: by 2025, every education setting in England should have a named sustainability lead and a climate action plan in place.

While the guidance isn't statutory, it is a strong signal that sustainability is moving up the agenda, and academies are in a prime position to lead.

Practical steps for your academy trust:

- **Appoint a sustainability lead** or review current responsibilities.
- **Map existing activities and data** to understand your starting point. This could include:
 - Visualising energy usage trends and highlighting current energy-saving initiatives
 - Waste reduction metrics and programs for further reduction
 - Curriculum integration
 - Student-led extra-curricular projects
 - Community engagement
- **Develop a climate action plan** template based on existing activities and data, that schools can adapt, with trust-wide goals if appropriate.
- **Engage governors, trustees and senior leaders**, ensuring sustainability is embedded in governance and risk processes.
- **Empower schools to involve pupils and staff** in developing their plans and sustainability activities.
- **Share your progress** – through your website, green newsletters, benchmarking tools such as [Eco-Schools](#) and [Let's Go Zero](#), events, or directly with the DfE, which is inviting case studies from education providers.

What should a climate action plan include?



The DfE's guidance sets out four core areas that a climate action plan should address:

1. **Decarbonisation** – How the setting is reducing its carbon footprint through energy use, travel, procurement, and building improvements.
2. **Adaptation and resilience** – Steps being taken to understand and manage climate-related risks, such as overheating, flooding, or storm damage.
3. **Environment and biodiversity** – Enhancing the natural environment through activities such as tree planting, rewilding, and outdoor learning, and engaging with the National Education Nature Park.
4. **Climate education and green careers** – Ensuring students are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to understand climate change and access green jobs.

The plan should reflect where your academy trust is on its journey. For some, it may mean pulling together existing initiatives into a single plan. For others, it might be the start of something new.

Our Helpdesk has also answered ad hoc queries regarding:

- Financial regulations
- Capital grants
- Pensions
- Accounting systems
- VAT
- Trustee appointments

Contact Us



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