

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

£4,400

Q1 January - March 2026

Take a look at some of the key topics our Helpdesk covered below during Q1 January - March 2026

Recruitment and Retention Payments

Recruiting and retaining high quality staff remains a significant challenge for many academy trusts, particularly in shortage subjects and specialist roles. To address this, some trusts consider recruitment and retention payments (RRPs) as part of their wider workforce strategy. While these payments can be effective, they also bring important governance, financial and employment considerations.



Q: What are recruitment and retention payments?

A: Recruitment and retention payments (RRPs) are additional payments made to staff to:

- Attract candidates to hard to fill roles (recruitment)
- Retain key staff where there is a demonstrable risk of loss (retention)

They are most commonly used for:

- Teaching staff in shortage subjects
- Senior leaders or specialists with scarce skills
- Occasionally, critically hard to replace support staff

Q: What are the key governance and compliance requirements?

A: Under the DfE Academy Trust Handbook, trusts must demonstrate:

- Regularity – payments are permitted by policy and contracts
- Propriety – payments are not excessive or personally motivated
- Value for money – cost is proportionate to risk and benefit

Expected controls include:

- A clear RRP policy (or section within the pay policy)
- Defined eligibility criteria
- Documented business cases
- Appropriate approval
- Time limits and review points

Q: What framework should be followed?

A: Many academy trusts mirror the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD), even though academies are not legally bound by it.

STPCD allows RRPs where:

- There is clear evidence of recruitment/retention difficulty
- Payments are time limited
- Payments are clearly documented and reviewed regularly

Good practice is to follow STPCD principles even where the trust has its own pay policy.

For support staff, recruitment and retention payments are usually determined in line with the trust's own pay policy and employment contracts, taking account of local benchmarking and overall affordability. Any such payments must be applied consistently, comply with equal pay and employment law, and be supported by clear justification, such as market evidence or a demonstrable operational risk to the trust.

Q: What common issues are identified?

A: Audit reviews frequently identify:

- RRPs paid with no written policy
- Payments continuing indefinitely with no review
- Lack of documented approval or business case
- Inconsistent treatment across academies
- RRPs used as a substitute for proper pay progression or restructuring

Good practice checklist for academy trusts

- ✔ Written recruitment and retention payment policy
- ✔ Clear criteria linked to labour market evidence
- ✔ Time limited payments (normally 1–3 years)
- ✔ Formal approval and documented rationale
- ✔ Annual review with evidence of ongoing need
- ✔ Consideration of affordability and equity
- ✔ Clear exit arrangements where need no longer exists

When used carefully, recruitment and retention payments can be a valuable tool to support workforce stability. However, they should sit within a transparent pay framework and be subject to the same level of scrutiny as any other significant financial decision. For academy trusts, the key is balancing flexibility in a challenging labour market with strong governance and value for money.

DfE Education Estates Strategy - a decade long reset for school estates

Published in February 2026, the DfE's Education Estates Strategy sets out a 10 year plan to improve, renew and future proof school and college buildings across England. Backed

by £38bn of capital investment, it responds to long standing issues such as building condition, RAAC, climate resilience, SEND capacity and fragmented funding.

Priorities for the sector	What you need to know
Core priority 1: Manage the estate better	A move from reactive maintenance to proactive, data-led estate management, supported by a new Manage Your Education Estate digital platform, annual light-touch estate returns against the School Estate Management Standards, and greater use of condition data to target funding and risk.
Core priority 2: Improve and renew existing buildings	Focused investment in schools that remain serviceable but require significant renewal, including a new Renewal and Retrofit Programme, expanded sustainability support, and clearer long-term visibility over maintenance funding.
Core priority 3: Build and rebuild where needed	Targeted rebuilding through an expanded School Rebuilding Programme, alongside new DfE design standards emphasising sustainability, indoor air quality, climate resilience and usability of space.
Funding reform	The Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) will be phased out by autumn 2028 and replaced with a simpler, non-competitive maintenance funding model, informed by standardised estate condition data.
SEND and place planning	Stronger alignment between estates planning, SEND sufficiency and inclusion, improved coordination of place planning, and clearer frameworks for managing surplus or under-used estate.
What this means for academy trusts	Increased accountability for estate data quality, earlier and more structured maintenance and capital planning, reduced reliance on short-term bidding, and greater scrutiny of how estates support SEND, sustainability and educational outcomes.

How Price Bailey can help

All existing audit clients can contact the Price Bailey Academy Helpdesk with estates related queries. We also provide independent internal scrutiny reviews covering estates governance and compliance.

[Find out more](#)

Our Helpdesk has also answered ad hoc queries regarding:

- Fixed assets
- DfE Chart of Accounts
- Policies
- Governance
- Employee benefits
- VAT

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