



Audit findings report

**North Hampshire Education Alliance
& QM Leisure Limited**

Year ending 31 August 2025



Strictly Private & Confidential

The Board of Trustees
North Hampshire Education Alliance
Cliddesden Road
Basingstoke
Hampshire
RG21 3HF

Our ref: PAC/KHS/C-10023374
10 December 2025

Dear Trustees,

North Hampshire Education Alliance

Audit findings for the year ended 31 August 2025

This Audit Findings Report highlights the significant findings arising from the audit for the benefit of those charged with governance. We appreciate that you may be aware of some of the matters contained in this report, however as required by International Standard on Auditing (UK) 260 we are communicating them to you formally.

As auditor we are responsible for performing the audit, in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs UK)), which is directed towards forming and expressing an opinion on the financial statements. The audit of the financial statements does not relieve management or those charged with governance of their responsibilities, including those in respect of the preparation of financial statements.

There is more detail in respect of the responsibilities of the auditor and those charged with governance within our engagement letter. Our standard terms and conditions can be found at <https://www.azets.co.uk/terms-of-business>.

The contents of this report relate only to those matters which came to our attention during the conduct of our normal audit procedures which are designed primarily for the purpose of expressing our opinion on the financial statements. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting or refraining from acting on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

We would like to take this opportunity to record our appreciation for the kind assistance provided by your team during our audit. If we can be of any further assistance, please contact Paul Creasey.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Azets Audit Services'.

Azets Audit Services

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1. Executive summary

Significant matters relevant to our audit

This table summarises the significant matters arising from the statutory audit of North Hampshire Education Alliance for the year ended 31 August 2025 for those charged with governance.

Audit opinion	We do not propose any modifications to our audit opinion which is unqualified. We have no matters to report regarding the adoption of the going concern basis or inadequate disclosures relating to material uncertainties. Our audit work is substantially complete and there are currently no matters which would require modification of our audit report.
Audit approach	There were no changes to our audit approach as set out to you in our letter dated 25 May 2025.
Significant audit findings	We have reported our significant audit findings on pages 2 to 7 and audit adjustments on page 9. The impact on the group's deficit is a decrease of £94,000.
Audit adjustments	We are required to communicate all potential adjustments, other than those considered to be clearly trivial, to management and to request that management corrects them. Details of the adjustments are given on page 8.
Internal controls	The purpose of the audit was for us to express an opinion on the financial statements. The audit included consideration of internal controls relevant to the preparation of the financial statements in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control. Our audit is, therefore, not designed to identify all control weaknesses. However, where, as part of our testing, we identify deficiencies in internal control, we have reported these to you on page 9.

2. Significant audit findings

This section of our report includes a summary of significant audit findings relating to significant risk areas identified at planning and other risk areas that required special consideration or arose during the course of the audit.

Please note our risk assessments made in the absence of internal controls as required by the Auditing Standards and may therefore appear higher than expected.

Significant risk areas identified at planning

Significant risks are risks that require special audit consideration and include identified risks of material misstatement that:

- our risk assessment procedures identified as being close to the upper range of the spectrum of inherent risk due to their nature and a combination of the likelihood and potential magnitude of misstatement; or
- are required to be treated as significant risks due to requirements of ISAs (UK), for example in relation to management override of internal controls.

Significant risks at the financial statement level

The below table summarises conclusions in relation to significant risks of material misstatement identified at the financial statement level. These risks are considered to have a pervasive impact on the financial statements as a whole and potentially affect many assertions for classes of transaction, account balances and disclosures.

Key risk area	Audit Approach	Conclusions
Management override of controls Management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of management's ability to manipulate accounting records and prepare fraudulent financial statements by overriding controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively. Although the level of risk of management override of controls will vary from entity to entity, the risk is nevertheless present in all entities. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, it is a risk of material misstatement due to fraud and thus a significant risk. Risk of material misstatement: Very high – fraud risk	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area included: • Review of accounting estimates, judgements and decisions made by management; • Testing of journal entries; • Review of any unusual significant transactions.	We used data analytics software to identify significant and unusual transactions outside of our expectations. We have attached an Info “Overall Impact Analysis” which highlights the elevated risk journals selected for testing by the software, which indicates transactions with the highest potential for management override, please see Appendix I. We performed targeted testing on net wages journals with an effective date of August 2025. This was selected due to the high volume of transaction in the period compared to other periods in the year. Based on the testing, we did not identify any issues. We also tested 16 samples in the user routines journal testing. The

		samples relate to monthly accruals journals, prepayments, DfE income transaction and journals posted to correctly allocate income and expenditure nominal codes due to the change on accounting system in the period. All journals were in line with our expectations, and no issues were identified. Conclusion From the testing performed, we have not identified any instances of management override of controls. All journals were posted for appropriate purposes.
Consolidation and Group Reporting Material misstatement due to fraudulent manipulation of entries in the consolidation process is a presumed risk under ISA 600 (Audits of group financial statements). Risk of material misstatement: Very High – Fraud Risk	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area included: • Review of consolidation workings and journals prepared by management	We obtained and reviewed the management workings of the consolidated account as at the end of the period. We have tested each of the financial statement areas of both the Academy and QM Leisure, and the intercompany reconciliations, no issues were identified. Conclusion We have not identified any instances of material misstatement due to fraudulent manipulation of entries in the consolidation process. All consolidation workings and journals were posted for appropriate purposes.

Other identified risks

The below table summarises conclusions in relation to other identified risks which although not considered to be significant required specific consideration during the audit or were risks otherwise identified during the course of the audit.

Identified risk of material misstatement	Audit approach	Conclusion
LGPS asset / liability and disclosures There is a risk that the liability and disclosures in respect of the local government pension scheme liability may be materially misstated.	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area included: • Review of basis of accounting treatment (and surplus recognition criteria, as relevant) • Review of assumptions made and comparison with other academy trusts • Assessing the reasonableness of source data used (including confirmation with pension fund auditor and analytical procedures, as required) • Evaluating whether significant events that impact on liabilities have been included • Review of adjustments and comparison with the actuary's report • Review of disclosures and comparison with the actuary's report • Review of the credentials of the actuary preparing the valuation	The College is reporting a pension surplus of £2.69 million as at 31 August 2025. Due to Hyman Robertson asset ceiling calculation and recognising projected future employer contributions exceed projected service costs therefore the asset ceiling restriction has been recognised in full. The assumptions that have been used in the actuarial valuation report have been reviewed, by comparison to those used by other Local Authorities across the country. The financial assumptions in question relate to the rate of increases in pensions and salary, discount rate and mortality rates. We note that most of the assumptions are equal to average with only the increase in salaries slightly above average. Most of the mortality rates are also just above average, except for Men retiring now, which is at the maximum. We have also reviewed the disclosures presented in the financial statements. Additional disclosures have been made in connection with the treatment of the surplus. Conclusion LGPS balance is appropriately recognised and disclosed in the accounts.

Income is misstated and may not exist Material misstatement due to fraudulent financial reporting relating to income recognition is a presumed risk in ISA 240 (The Auditor's Responsibilities Relating to Fraud in an Audit of Financial Statements). However, as such income is dictated by persons outside of the Trust, we have rebutted the risk that it could adopt accounting policies or recognise revenue in such a way as to lead to a material misstatement in the reported revenue position Inherent risk of material misstatement: NHEA Income (Occurrence): Medium	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include: • Review and testing of income recognition policies; • Detailed substantive testing on material revenue streams.	Grant income has been verified to DfE award letters, published allocation tables or remittance advice notes. Non-grant income for NHEA has been tested on a sample basis, back to supporting documentation. No issues were noted. Conclusion From the testing performed, income has been properly recognised for NHEA.
Laws and regulations There is a risk that the Trust is not compliant with the laws and regulations relevant to academy trusts. Risk of material misstatement: Medium	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area will include: • Review of meeting minutes to identify instances of non-compliance • Enquiries with management about potential litigation • Review of legal expense accounts to evaluate the nature of significant legal matters and the impact on the audit approach	We reviewed transactions in the Nominal Ledger relating to professional and legal fees and consultancy, we also reviewed all board minutes in the year and discussed with management about potential legal claims and general compliance with laws and DfE regulations. From the above, we confirmed that there has been no correspondence with the DfE in the year. Conclusion There have been no indications of non-compliance with regulators and there are no claims or litigation against the trust in the period under review.
Going Concern There is a risk that a material uncertainty related to going concern exists and that management's use of the going concern basis of preparation of the financial statements is inappropriate.	Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area included: • Review of budgets/forecasts for the period to December 2026. • Review of the management's assessment of going concern to determine whether the assumption is accurate. • Review of the disclosures relating to going concern in the accounts	We obtained the 3-year forecast and reviewed the assumptions underpinning these budgets. Small deficits are predicted for each of the next three years, based on student numbers ranging from 1,957 to 1,994. Staff costs beyond August 2026 have been forecast to increase at 2%; other costs have mainly been held constant. Management have presented Trustees with a sensitivity analysis on future reserves positions, based on scenarios where funding increases from 0% to 3%. This was accompanied by plans for savings and

additional income generation in 2025-26 and 2026-27 to mitigate the shortfall.

We have also reviewed the cash flow forecast to August 2026. Cash balances are predicted to be £1.2m at this date. The cash balance is not expected to fall below £1m at any point between now and December 2026, which supports the loans covenants being met.

Conclusion

We agree with the Trustees' use of the Going Concern basis in preparing the financial statements.

Change of accounting system

There is a risk that errors may have arisen in the data transfer to the new accounting system.

Risk of material misstatement: Low

Procedures performed to mitigate risks of material misstatement in this area included:

- Review the opening balances migrated to the new accounting system.
- Update systems documentation to reflect changes in process arising from the new system.

The accounting system was changed during the year (March 2025), however transactions from 1 September 2024 were recorded in the new system

We obtained the TB from Financials Live as at 31 August 2024 and the TB on the new system as at 31 August 2024 to ensure the correct transfer. No issues were noted.

The TB for QML did not have all the opening balances recorded as the old system did not allow the balances between QML and QMC to be posted separately which is one of the main reasons for the change in accounting system. This has now been aligned.

3. Audit communication

Materiality

Whilst our audit procedures are designed to identify misstatements which are material to our audit opinion, we also report to those charged with governance and management any uncorrected misstatements of lower value errors to the extent that our audit identifies these.

Under ISA (UK) 260 'Communication with those charged with governance', we are obliged to report uncorrected omissions or misstatements other than those which are 'clearly trivial' to those charged with governance. ISA (UK) 260 defines 'clearly trivial' as matters that are clearly inconsequential, whether taken individually or in aggregate and whether judged by any quantitative or qualitative criteria.

An omission or misstatement is regarded as material if it would reasonably influence the users of the financial statements. The assessment of what is material is a matter of professional judgement and is affected by our assessment of the risk profile of the business and the needs of the users.

Accounting policies

The accounting policies used in preparing the financial statements have been deemed appropriate for the audited period.

Presentation and disclosures

Our work included a review of the adequacy of disclosures in the financial statements and consideration of the appropriateness of the accounting policies and estimation techniques adopted by the entity. We identified a number of reclassification adjustments and some minor presentational issues in the Group, and these have all been amended by management.

Overall, we found the disclosed accounting policies, significant accounting estimates and the overall disclosures and presentation to be appropriate.

Fraud and suspected fraud

We have previously discussed the risk of fraud with management. We have not been made aware of

any incidents in the period nor have any incidents come to our attention as a result of our audit testing.

Our work as auditor is not intended to identify any instances of fraud of a non-material nature and should not be relied upon for this purpose. In the event that the directors wish to obtain enhanced assurance with regard to the effectiveness of internal control in preventing and detecting fraud we should be happy to provide additional services.

Written representations

We will present the final letter of representation to the Board to sign at the same time as the financial statements are approved.

Related parties

We are not aware of any related party transactions which have not been disclosed.

For some individuals, we found directorships at Companies House that were not disclosed on their Declaration of Interest form. This has been raised as a control point.

Confirmations from third parties

All requested third party confirmations have been received.

4. Misstatements

Adjusted Audit differences

No	Detail	SOFA		Balance Sheet		Net Income /(Expenditure)
		Dr	Cr	Dr	Cr	
		£	£	£	£	£
Deficit as presented for audit						(588,000)
1	Late client journal: to correct carrying value of ICT equipment		94,000	94,000		94,000
Deficit per financial statements						(494,000)

Unadjusted audit differences

At the end of the audit, the following immaterial items remained unadjusted

No	Detail	SOFA		Balance Sheet		Net Income /(Expenditure)
		Dr	Cr	Dr	Cr	
		£	£	£	£	£
1	To accrue for the NIC grant received post year end		72,704	72,704		72,704
Net impact on deficit						72,704

5. Internal controls

The purpose of the audit was for us to express an opinion on the financial statements. The audit included consideration of internal controls relevant to the preparation of the financial statements in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control. Our audit is, therefore, not designed to identify all control weaknesses and the matters reported below are limited to those deficiencies that we have identified during the audit.

Control weaknesses and recommendations

Control weaknesses and recommendations identified from our current year work are summarised below. The control weaknesses are categorised into three risk ratings as shown in the key.

Key

1. Significant deficiency

2. Other deficiency

3. Other observations

Table of control weaknesses and recommendations

Risk rating	Control weakness identified	Implication	Recommendation	Management Response
2	For two trustees, we noted directorships at Companies House that were not included on their Declaration of Interest forms.	The Trusts risks inadvertently entering into related party transactions.	That Trustees be reminded to include all connections on their Declaration of Interest forms.	We will continue to remind Trustees to include all connections in their declaration of interests.
3	Many assets do not have an identifying label/sticker on them.	It is difficult to verify the assets physically as there are no unique identifier attached to the assets to agree them to the assets per the register.	Attach a form of identification on each asset which matches the asset number on the fixed asset register. This can help keep track of all assets.	This recommendation will be considered as part of the fixed assets review that is due in 25/26.

6. Independence and ethics

In accordance with our profession's ethical requirements and further to our audit planning letter issued confirming audit arrangements there are no further matters to bring to your attention in relation to our integrity, objectivity, and independence.

We confirm that Azets Audit Services and the engagement team complied with the FRC's Ethical Standard. We confirm that all threats to our independence have been properly addressed through appropriate safeguards and that we are independent and able to express an objective opinion on the financial statements.

Audit and non-audit services

The following services were provided in the year to 31 August 2025:

Audit services	Fees 2025 £
Statutory audit - NHEA	18,650
Statutory audit – QM Leisure Limited	5,775
Regularity review	1,320
Total audit services	25,745

Non-audit service	Fees 2025 £	Type of threat	Safeguard
Teachers' Pension Scheme	1,050	Self-review	Performed by a team separate from that of the audit team.
Academies Accounts Return review	1,470	Self-review	Performed by a team separate from that of the audit team.
Corporation Tax Return – QM Leisure Limited	785	Self-review	Performed by a team separate from that of the audit team.
Financial statements preparation - NHEA	2,150	Self-review	Performed by a team separate from that of the audit team.
Financial statements preparation – QM Leisure Limited	1,365	Self-review	Performed by a team separate from that of the audit team.

7. Emerging Issues (for information only)

Digital and technology standards

Trusts should refer to the DfE's digital and technology standards, which were developed to support trusts in making more informed decisions about technology. The 2025 Handbook has updated the extent to which Trusts are meeting the DfE's digital and technology standards. All should be working towards meeting the following 6 core standards by 2030:

- Broadband internet
- Network switching
- Wireless network
- Cyber security
- Filtering and monitoring
- Digital leadership and governance

Find out more about DfE's plan technology for your school service, which allows trusts to self-assess against the standards and receive personalised recommendations for their next steps. ([Plan technology for your school - GOV.UK](#))

Sustainability and climate action plans

The DfE's has the following strategy "By 2025, all education settings will have nominated a sustainability lead and put in place a climate action plan". This includes early years settings, schools, multi-academy trusts, colleges, and universities.

Wherever you are on your sustainability journey, this non-statutory guidance and the support now available can help you get started or take the next step.

The 2025 Handbook includes links to additional guidance form trusts to help them develop their action plans, see the below links:

[Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education - GOV.UK](#)

Estates Management

An academy trust's estate is both an asset and a mechanism to deliver outcomes for pupils. DfE expects academy trusts to manage their school estate strategically and effectively and maintain their estate in a safe working condition. This includes complying with statutory duties to ensure the health and safety of building occupants.

Trusts should ensure they are aware of and are applying the following guidance relevant to estates safety and management:

- School estate management standards, which schools can use to understand where to start to become fully effective, how to progress and prioritise, and how to make best use of expert advice
- advice, standards and tools for academy trusts at Good estate management for schools, including guidance on an estate's strategy and asset management plan, and the Estate management competency framework for standards on the skills and knowledge needed for individuals at all levels
- the Condition Data Collection (CDC) process which helps DfE understand the condition of government funded schools across England for the purposes of targeting funding where it is needed most
- Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC): identification guidance – RAAC is a weaker form of concrete used in floors, walls, and roofs of buildings constructed or modified between the 1950s and mid-1990s and could pose a particular risk
- School capital funding guidance, who it's for, current and past allocations, how it's calculated and spending guidance

- Condition Improvement Fund including links to terms and conditions

The Accounting Officer

The Accounting Officer role

The accounting officer role includes specific responsibilities for financial matters. It includes a personal responsibility to Parliament and to DfE's accounting officer for the trust's financial resources.

Accounting officers must be able to assure DfE's accounting officer, Parliament and the public, of high standards of probity in the management of public funds, particularly regularity, propriety, feasibility and value for money, including economy, efficiency and effectiveness – the 3 elements of value for money.

The following definitions are set out in Managing Public Money (MPM):

- **Regularity:** the proposed transaction is compliant with the framework of authorities of the department or body concerned. That the transaction under consideration has sufficient legal basis, parliamentary authority, and Treasury authorisation; is compatible with the agreed spending budgets, the wider legal framework (for example subsidy control and procurement law), and the requirements regarding spending set out in this document.
- **Propriety:** the proposal meets high standards of public conduct and relevant Parliamentary control procedures and expectations, including compliance with any conventions or commitments made to Parliament and cross-cutting government policies or standards, as well as the standards of conduct and good governance, as set out in this document.
- **Value for money:** in comparison to alternative proposals or doing nothing, the proposal delivers the stated policy objectives in a way that represents good value for the Exchequer as a whole, taking into consideration the chances of different degrees of success or failure.
- **Feasibility:** the proposal can be implemented accurately, sustainably, and to the intended timetable with the resources available and without incurring wasteful or nugatory spend.

These definitions are not set out in MPM but may be useful:

- **Economy:** reducing the cost of resources used for an activity, while maintaining quality.
- **Effectiveness:** achieving the intended outcomes or objectives.
- **Efficiency:** achieving maximum output for given inputs, or minimum inputs for a given output.

Accounting officers must adhere to The Seven Principles of Public Life.

The accounting officer must have oversight of financial transactions, by:

- ensuring the academy trust's property and assets are under the trustees' control and measures exist to prevent losses or misuse
- ensuring bank accounts, financial systems and financial records are operated by more than one person
- keeping full and accurate accounting records to support their annual accounts

The accounting officer's annual statement

The accounting officer must complete and sign a statement on regularity, propriety and compliance each year and submit this to DfE with the audited accounts. The accounting officer must also demonstrate how the trust has secured value for money in the governance statement in the audited accounts.

The accounting officer's duty to raise concerns

The accounting officer must take personal responsibility (which must not be delegated) for assuring the board that the trust is complying with the funding agreement and handbook.

The accounting officer must advise the board, in writing, if action it is considering is incompatible with the articles, funding agreement or handbook. This includes where such action conflicts with the duties of the accounting officer, to ensure regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility.

Similarly, the accounting officer must advise the board, in writing, if the board fails to act where required by the funding agreement or handbook. Where the board is minded to proceed, despite the accounting officer's advice, the accounting officer must consider the board's reasons and, if the accounting officer still considers the action proposed by the board is in breach of the articles, the funding agreement or handbook, the accounting officer must notify DfE's accounting officer immediately in writing.

Procurement and Spending decisions

The academy trust must be able to show that public funds have been used as intended by Parliament.

The academy trust must ensure:

- spending has been for the purpose intended and there is propriety in the use of public funds, including in relation to any actual or perceived conflicts of interest
- spending decisions represent value for money
- internal delegation levels are applied
- a competitive procurement procedure is in place and incorporated into the trust's financial framework, and the procurement rules and thresholds in the Procurement Act 2023 and its associated regulations and Find a Tender service are observed
- appropriate due diligence is in place
- professional advice is obtained where appropriate

Trusts should refer to the Buying for schools: how to buy what you need tool to help obtain value for money and apply relevant procurement regulations.

Trusts should consider DfE opportunities when making purchasing decisions for goods and services.

Setting and Publication of pay

Setting of Pay

The board of trustees must ensure its decisions about levels of executive pay (including salary and any other benefits) follow a robust evidence-based process and are a reasonable and defensible reflection of the individual's role and responsibilities. No individual can be involved in deciding their remuneration. Decisions about executive pay may be challenged by DfE.

The board must discharge its responsibilities effectively, ensuring its approach to, and levels of, pay and benefits is transparent, proportionate and defensible. This must be documented in an agreed pay policy, which sets out the process for determining executive pay and includes:

- independent scrutiny by the board
- robust decision-making that demonstrates justifiable pay
- proportionality – that pay and benefits represent good value for money and are defensible relative to the public sector market
- documented decision-making with rationale and approval by the board
- a basic presumption that executive pay and benefits should not increase at a faster rate than that of teachers, in individual years and over the longer term

Publication of pay

The trust must publish on its website in a separate readily accessible form the number of employees whose benefits exceeded £100,000, in £10,000 bandings, for the previous year ended 31 August. Benefits for this purpose include salary, employers' pension contributions, other taxable benefits and termination payments.

Where the academy trust has entered into an off-payroll arrangement with someone who is not an employee, the amount paid by the trust for that person's work for the trust must also be included in the website disclosure where payment exceeds £100,000 as if they were an employee.

Novel, contentious or repercussive transactions – a reminder

Novel, contentious or repercussive transactions must always be referred to DfE for approval, and the request must be made to, and approved by, DfE before the transaction is agreed and before the transaction occurs.

- Novel transactions are those of which the academy trust has no experience, or are outside its range of normal business.
- Contentious transactions are those that may cause criticism of the trust by Parliament, the public or the media.
- Repercussive transactions are those likely to set a precedent and cause pressure on other trusts or the broader public sector to take a similar approach and hence have wider financial implications, including where a trust's proposal could cause additional costs to arise for other parts of government.

Cybercrime

Academy trusts must also be aware of the risk of cybercrime, put in place proportionate controls and take appropriate action where a cyber security incident has occurred. Trusts should take appropriate action to meet DfE's cyber security standards, which were developed to help them improve their resilience against cyber-attacks.

Trusts must not pay any cyber ransom demands. DfE supports the National Crime Agency's recommendation not to encourage, endorse, or condone the payment of ransom demands. Payment of ransoms has no guarantee of restoring access or services and is likely to result in repeat incidents.

Companies House

Companies House register

Companies House register currently shows directors details including name, date of birth, registered address and occupation. From 21 July 2025 anyone listed on the register can apply to have the day of their date of birth removed. There is a £30 fee to remove any personal details, and the full guidance on what can be removed and how to action this can be found [Removing your personal details from the Companies House register - GOV.UK](#)

Companies House ID verification

From 18 November 2025 identity verification is a new legal requirement. It will help to deter people intending to use companies for illegal purposes.

By law, you will need to verify your identity to confirm you are who you claim to be.

This will:

- reduce the risk of fraud
- improve transparency, trust and accuracy of information on the Companies House register

Who needs to verify

You'll need to verify your identity if you are:

- a director
- the equivalent of a director – this includes members, general partners and managing officers
- a [person with significant control \(PSC\)](#)

- an Authorised Corporate Service Provider (ACSP) - also known as a Companies House authorised agent
- someone who files for a company - for example, a company secretary
- In most cases, you'll only need to verify your identity once. You must not verify again unless we tell you to.

Filing accounts by Software only

Companies House have advised that as part of their journey to modernise and digitise filing routes, all accounts must be filed using commercial software from 1 April 2027. Their web and paper routes will be closed for accounts filings. This change will allow more efficient and secure filings for companies and will be a critical step towards improving the quality of the data on the register. Software-only accounts filing will create a single, cost-effective, sustainable and traceable way to file.

Corporation tax

Academies often do not have a Corporation Tax liability due to favourable tax exemptions, they still fall within the requirement to submit Corporation Tax returns, if not on an annual basis, at least on a 3–6-year periodical basis.

All academies must complete a Company Tax Return if HMRC issues them with a 'Notice to Deliver a Company Tax Return' or they have income or gains which are not covered by a relief or exemption.

We have seen an increase in requests sent to our academy clients. Please do not ignore these and contact your engagement partner or tax representative for support.

Leasing

There is a change coming as to how lease contracts are recognised within the financial statements. Trusts will need to assess whether a contract is, or contains, a lease for accounting periods beginning on or after 1 January 2026.

Where it's concluded that the contract is – or does contain – a lease, the lessee will need to recognise that lease on the balance sheet by recording both an asset and a liability. The asset reflects the right to use the asset over the lease term and the liability reflects the entity's obligation to make lease payments.

Leases that are short-term (lease term of 12 months or less) or for low-value assets are exempt from the changes and will not need to be recognised on the balance sheet.

Where a contract does not contain a lease or the lease is exempt, payments are expensed through the Statement of Financial Activities over the lease term.

Good practice guidance

The DfE have issued a number of good practice guides. They do not replace or modify any requirements set out in the Academy Trust Handbook and the Academies Accounts Direction. They aim to provide suggestions about good practice.

Currently the following is available as a good practice guide:

- Fraud awareness
- Streamlined Energy and Carbon reporting
- Operating an academy trust as a going concern
- Choosing an external auditor for an academy trust
- Managing Academy trust reserves
- Managing risk in an academy trust
- Leasing for academy trusts
- Academy trust management accounting

- Internal scrutiny in academy trusts
- Understanding management letters for academy trusts
- Preparing your academy trusts' accounts for external audit
- Tendering 'jargon busting' guide for academy trusts
- Local Government Pension Scheme

VAT – audit review

The academy is currently not VAT registered and reclaiming VAT via the Form 126.

Our audit does not examine VAT in detail and our audit procedures are not designed to detect immaterial fraud or error. Therefore, we have not reviewed individual streams of income to:

- Assess whether the academy is over the VAT registration threshold
- Ascertain whether the VAT reclaimed is correct

There are a number of income streams that may be liable to VAT, we have provided some common areas below, but please note this is not an exhaustive list:

- Contracts whereby you receive commission or the net of income/costs for items such as uniform. The contract may be worded in such a way that you are actually the primary supplier and not an agent, if this is the case then you may be liable to register and charge VAT on these items.
- The sale of meals to staff is a supply liable to VAT. The VAT treatment of outsourced catering contracts means that an Academy will act as principle in the sale of all meals. The sale of a meal to a member of staff (not a duty meal) will count towards the VAT registration limit
- Certain supplies under salary sacrifice schemes can have a VAT implication either as the amounts count towards the VAT registration limit or VAT on expenses could be restricted.
- Although the majority of income from letting the premises will be exempt depending on the exact nature of the "let" and to whom the let could be "taxable". If additional services are supplied as a separate cost, they would be seen as taxable. Any charges for parking would be taxable.

From experience most Academies have some business income and if not, VAT registered we would expect there to be some irrecoverable VAT. Is the Academy carrying out the appropriate restrictions and checks on the VAT claimed via the VAT 126 form?

If required Azets can organise an initial meeting with our VAT experts to discuss any potential issues or pitfalls with you.

8. Academy Trust Handbook 2025 Musts

The requirements in the handbook brought together into one list: the 'musts'. It abbreviates these requirements and so cannot be used as a substitute for the full handbook. Links to the relevant sections are included, which must be read in full. Also provides a column to confirm if you are compliant and a column for any comments.

Schedule of Musts 2025			
These are the requirements in the Academy Trust Handbook brought together into one list: the 'musts'. It abbreviates these requirements and so cannot be used as a substitute for the full handbook.			
References to the relevant sections are included, which must be read in full. This tool is an entirely optional resource, and there is no requirement to submit it to DfE.			
Paragraph	Requirement	In Place: - Fully compliant -Working towards - Not in place	Comments Action to take
Top 10 'musts' for chairs and other trustees			
1.11 and 1.12	Apply highest standards of conduct and ensure robust governance, comply with charitable objects, with duties as company directors, with charity law and the funding agreement.		
2.3	Ensure the board of trustees meets at least three times a year.		
2.4	Approve a written scheme of delegation of financial powers.		
2.10	Ensure the board approves a balanced budget for the financial year and minutes their approval		
2.19 and 2.20	Share management accounts with the chair of trustees monthly and consider when the board meets, taking action to maintain financial viability		
2.27 and 2.28	Ensure decisions about executive pay follow a robust evidence-based process, that is documented in an agreed pay policy, reflecting the individual's role and responsibilities, and that the approach to pay is transparent, proportionate and defensible.		
3.6 to 3.13	Appoint an audit and risk committee (either dedicated or combined with another committee) to advise on the adequacy of the trust's controls and risks.		
4.4	Submit audited accounts to DfE by 31 December		
4.14	Ensure an appropriate, reasonable and timely response to findings by auditors, taking opportunities to strengthen financial management and control		

5.34 - 5.54	Manage conflicts of interest, be even-handed with related parties, and ensure goods or services provided by them are at no more than cost, beyond the limits in this Handbook		
Roles and responsibilities			
	Adhere to The 7 principles of public life		
1.1	Have the skills, knowledge and experience to run the trust		
1.3	Have at least three members but should have five or more		
1.4	Have suitability checks in place for members to ensure they are not subject to a direction under section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008		
1.5	Not have members as employees, nor have members occupy staff roles on an unpaid voluntary basis		
1.21, 1.37 and 2.7	Ensure regularity, propriety and value for money		
1.21	Trustees to take ownership of financial sustainability and ability to operate as a going concern		
1.24	Ensure committees contain a majority of trustees		
1.25	Not have de facto trustees or shadow directors		
1.27	Include a review of the trust's governance structure and board composition in the governance statement when producing audited accounts for the first time		
1.28	Appoint a senior executive leader (should be principal or chief executive)		
1.29 to 1.38	Appoint an accounting officer (the senior executive leader) with responsibility for regularity, propriety and value for money and for assuring the board about compliance with the funding agreement and handbook		
1.35	Demonstrate in the governance statement how the trust has secured value for money		
1.35 and 4.12	Include a statement on regularity, propriety and compliance, signed by the accounting officer, in the audited accounts		
1.39	Appoint a chief financial officer to lead the finance department		
1.40	Have appropriately qualified and/or experienced finance staff		
1.42	Appoint a governance professional (clerk to the board)		
1.43	Be transparent with governance arrangements		
1.44 and 1.49	Publish the trust's governance arrangements in its governance statement and in a readily accessible form on its website		

1.45 - 1.48	Capture in an up to date register of interests the relevant business and financial interests of (as a minimum) members, trustees, local governors and senior employees [1.45] and interests of other individuals as described in 1.47		
1.49	Publish relevant business and financial interests of members, trustees, local governors and accounting officers		
1.50	Ensure governance documents are available for public inspection		
1.52	Arrange DBS checks as appropriate		
Main financial requirements			
2.1	Maintain robust oversight of the trust		
2.2	Take responsibility for financial affairs, stewardship of assets and use resources efficiently		
2.6	Have sound internal control, risk management and assurance processes		
2.7 and 2.24	Establish a control framework that includes: ensuring delegated financial authorities are complied with, and segregation of duties maintained co-ordinating the planning and budgeting process discipline in financial management, including managing debtors, creditors, cash flow and monthly bank reconciliations planning and oversight of capital projects including those relating to estates safety management and oversight of assets including maintenance of a fixed asset register regularity, propriety and value for money reducing fraud and theft independent checking of controls, systems, transactions and risks a competitive procurement procedure		
2.8 and 2.9	Prepare and monitor financial plans to ensure the trust remains a going concern and ensure rigour and scrutiny in budget management		
2.11	Ensure budget forecasts are accurate, based on realistic assumptions and reflective of lessons learned from previous years		

2.15 and 2.16	Submit a budget forecast return to DfE, approved by the board of trustees		
2.17	Notify DfE within 14 days if proposing a deficit revenue budget for the current financial year which it cannot address after taking into account unspent funds from previous years, as this would be non-compliant with the funding agreement and this handbook		
2.18	Prepare management accounts every month.		
2.21	Manage cash position robustly and avoid becoming overdrawn		
2.22	Have a cautious approach to investments in line with the handbook principles		
2.23	Show that public funds have been used as intended by Parliament		
2.29	Publish on trust's website the number of employees whose benefits exceeded £100k, in £10k bandings		
2.30	Ensure senior employees' payroll arrangements meet HM Treasury's tax requirements		
2.31	Approach DfE to seek approval when entering into a new electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme or accepting any further employees onto an existing electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme.		
2.32	Not use trust's funds to purchase alcohol for consumption, except where it is to be used in religious services		
2.35 and 2.36	Manage risks, including contingency and business continuity planning and maintain a risk register. Board to retain oversight of risk and conduct a full review of risk register at least annually.		
2.37	Have adequate insurance or be a member of DfE's risk protection arrangement		
2.39	Implement reasonable risk management audit recommendations		
2.40 to 2.44	Have published procedures for whistleblowing and respond properly and fairly		
2.45	Provide DfE or its agents with information of sufficient quality to meet funding requirements		
2.46 to 2.50	Notify DfE via Get information about schools within 14 days of changes in information about members, trustees, local governors, chair of trustees, chairs of local		

	governing bodies, accounting officer and chief financial officer		
Internal scrutiny			
3.1 to 3.5	Check financial and non-financial controls and risks		
3.13	Ensure information submitted to DfE affecting funding is accurate and compliant		
3.14 to 3.17	Ensure checks are conducted by someone independent, suitably qualified and experienced		
3.14 and 3.15	Provide internal scrutiny reports to the audit and risk committee and make the findings available to all trustees promptly		
3.19	Confirm in the governance statement which internal scrutiny option has been applied and why		
3.20	Provide annual summary of internal scrutiny to DfE by 31 December, and provide other internal scrutiny reports on request		
Annual accounts and external audit			
4.1 to 4.4	Produce audited accounts, publish on the trust's website by 31 January and file with Companies House		
4.5 and 4.6	Appoint an external auditor in writing, for the annual accounts		
4.6	Put any additional services from the external auditor in a separate letter of engagement		
4.7	Provide in the audit contract for the removal of external auditors		
4.8	Notify DfE immediately of the removal or resignation of external auditors, and the reasons		
4.9	Prepare information, at DfE's request, for the sector annual report and accounts		
4.13	Include a review of the accounting officer's statement on regularity, propriety and compliance within the external auditor's remit, and address the auditor's conclusions on regularity jointly to the trust and DfE		
4.15	Audit and risk committee to review the external auditor's plan, annual accounts, audit findings, management response and effectiveness of the external auditor and produce annual report of conclusions		
Delegated authorities			

5.1 to 5.3	Obtain DfE's prior approval for transactions beyond the trust's delegated limits		
5.4	Make financial disclosures in the annual accounts in line with this handbook		
5.5	Refer novel, contentious and/or repercussive transactions to DfE for prior approval		
5.8	For staff severance payments, consider the following before committing: whether the proposed payment is in the trust's interests whether payment is justified and value for money, based on a legal assessment review the level of settlement, which must be less than the legal assessment of what the relevant body (e.g. employment tribunal) is likely to award		
5.10	Obtain DfE's prior approval for the non-contractual/non-statutory element of a staff severance payment of £50,000 or more (gross, before deductions)		
5.11	Not accept a settlement for a staff severance payment unless satisfying the conditions in this handbook		
5.12	Obtain prior approval for special staff severance payments of £100k or more which include a non-statutory/non-contractual element, and/or where the employee earns over £150k		
5.13	Ensure confidentiality clauses do not prevent an individual's right to make disclosures in the public interest		
5.14	For compensation payments, based on appraisal, including legal advice, ensuring value for money		
5.15	Obtain DfE's prior approval for non-contractual/non-statutory compensation payments of £50,000 or more		
5.17	Obtain DfE's prior approval for other types of special payments		
5.18 and 5.19	Obtain DfE's prior approval for writing off debts and losses, guarantees, letters of comfort and indemnities beyond limits in this handbook		
5.22 and 5.23	Obtain DfE's prior approval, before acquiring and disposing of fixed assets beyond limits in this handbook and ensure disposal achieves best price		
5.25 to 5.27	Obtain DfE's prior approval for leases beyond limits in this handbook		

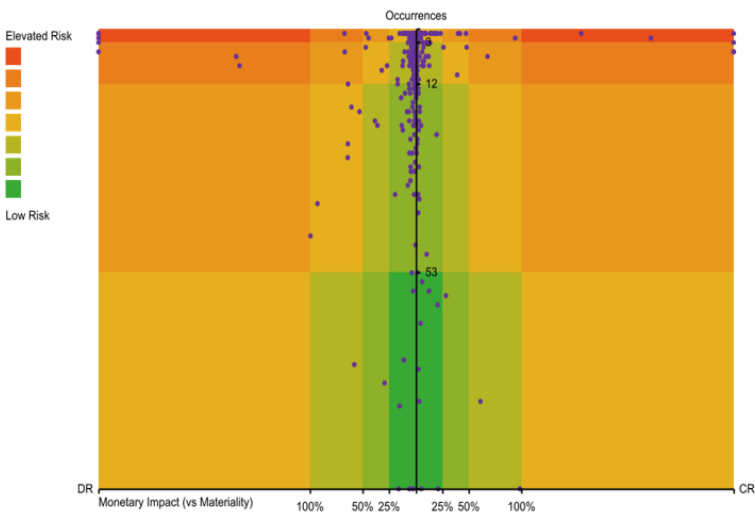
5.30	Consider the funding needs of individual academies if pooling GAG, and have an appeals mechanism		
5.30	Not pool PFI funding		
5.31	Ensure gifts by the trust have the decision documented, and have regard to propriety and regularity		
5.32	Obtain DfE's prior approval before borrowing, including overdrafts but excluding finance leases on the DfE approved list, and only use credit cards for business expenditure		
5.35	Ensure no member, trustee, local governor, employee or related individual or organisation uses their connection to the trust for personal gain		
5.35	Ensure no payments to trustees unless permitted by the articles and comply with the terms of any agreement with the Secretary of State		
5.35	Obtain Charity Commission prior approval for paying a trustee for acting as a trustee		
5.37	Ensure the board chair and the accounting officer manage their relationships with related parties to avoid real and perceived conflicts of interest		
5.38 and 5.39	Recognise that related party transactions may attract public scrutiny and require sufficient disclosure in annual accounts to support accountability and transparency		
5.40	Report all contracts and other agreements with related parties to DfE in advance		
5.41 to 5.43	Obtain DfE prior approval for contracts and other agreements with related parties beyond limits in this handbook subject to the exceptions in 5.41		
The regulator and intervention			
6.2	Arrange for letters to trusts' accounting officers from DfE about the accountability framework to be discussed by the board and, where appropriate, strengthen the trust's systems		
6.3	Provide DfE with access to books, records, information, explanations, assets, premises and staff to assist with its audits		
6.4	Provide DfE with permission for any third party to provide requested information where there are concerns or an investigation is ongoing at a trust		
6.5	Retain records for at least six years after the period to which funding relates		
6.6	Send DfE a financial management and governance self-assessment for new academy trusts		

6.6	Submit school resource management self-assessment checklist to DfE annually		
6.9	Be aware of the risk of fraud, theft and irregularity and address with proportionate controls and appropriate action		
6.10	Notify DfE of fraud or theft over £5,000, individually or cumulatively, or of any value where unusual or systematic		
6.14	Be aware of the risk of cybercrime and put in place proportionate controls and appropriate action where a cyber security incident has occurred		
6.15	Not pay any cyber ransom demands		
6.18	Comply with a Notice to Improve		
6.19	Waive delegated authorities and obtain DfE approval of certain transactions described in this handbook if the trust has an Ntl		
6.20	Publish the Ntl on the trust's website until it is lifted		
6.28	Cooperate with NAO and provide help, information and explanations		

Appendix I

Overall Impact Analysis

Inflo's Overall Impact Analysis combines all transactions with identical general ledger code combinations. This visualization then plots for each combination the frequency of transactions and the aggregate profit impact.



During the period there were a total of 8,408 transactions within North Hampshire Education Alliance's Other system. When combined, 1,201 unique general ledger code combinations were found.

A total of 8 combinations were flagged in the highest risk category, being those occurring fewer than 4 times and having a significant impact on reported profit (in red). There were 14 transactions within these combinations.

Other Findings on Highest Risk Transactions

- Most common User ID: Blank
- Most common Document Type: JNL
- Largest Impact to General Ledger Code: 1027782.54

AZETS