

STAFF FINANCIAL HANDBOOK

2025-2026



Girls' Learning Trust

$$\begin{aligned} &4 + 2 \times 6 \\ &= 4 + 12 \\ &= 16 \end{aligned}$$

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KEY POLICIES

Staff should also be aware of the following key finance policies in place in the Trust:

1. Staff Expenses Policy
2. Anti-Fraud and Bribery Policy
3. Gifts and Hospitality Policy
4. Procurement Policy
5. Charges and Remissions Policy
6. Reserves Policy
7. 16-19 Bursary Policy

1. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Budget Holder: A designated staff member, as defined in the Trust's Scheme of Delegation, responsible for managing and overseeing a specific budget. They are accountable for approving expenditures within their delegated authority and for ensuring adherence to the Trust's budget.

BACS (Bankers' Automated Clearing Services): An electronic system used to make payments directly from one bank account to another. The Trust uses BACS for processing most payments, including staff expenses and payments to suppliers.

Department for Education (DfE): The UK government department responsible for education and children's services. The DfE sets the regulatory and financial framework for academies, including requirements in the *Academy Trust Handbook*. The DfE is also directly responsible for allocating funding to academy trusts (previously managed by the ESFA), as well as monitoring financial management and governance standards across the sector.

Free School Meals (FSM): Government-funded meals provided to eligible students (as defined by DfE criteria), with allocations managed via the school's catering systems.

Goods Received Note (GRN): A document used to confirm that goods/services ordered have been received in good condition. The GRN must be completed in the finance portal to trigger payment to the supplier.

ParentPay: A third-party online payment system used by the Trust to facilitate payments from parents for various school activities, including meals and trips.

PS Financials (PSF) Portal: A specific finance management software used by the Trust, which includes tools for budget management, requisition processing, and financial reporting.

Purchase Order (PO): A formal document issued by the Trust's Finance Team to a supplier, authorising the purchase of goods or services. A PO specifies the details of an order, including quantities, prices, and delivery terms. No goods or services may be ordered without an approved PO, except where explicitly permitted by policy (e.g. Caxton Card use).

Purchase to Pay (P2P) Team: The operational members of the Finance Department responsible for managing the full purchasing cycle, from requisition through to payment, and ensuring all purchases comply with Trust policies. The P2P team also records Trust income, raises invoices to customers, and supports accurate financial processing across the Trust.

Requisition (REQ): An internal document or request raised by a budget holder or designated staff to initiate the purchase of goods or services. Requisitions must be approved before a purchase orders are issued by the Finance Team.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

For staff with queries regarding purchasing/payments/invoicing: finance@girlslearningtrust.org

For staff with queries regarding payroll/staff expenses: payrollhelpdesk@girlslearningtrust.org

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Trust Board: The Trust Board has overall responsibility for the Trust's finances. They agree the budget, check how money is being spent, and make sure public funds are used properly and for the benefit of pupils.

Finance Committee: A group of Trustees who look more closely at finance and risk. They check that good systems are in place, review budgets and reports, and monitor audit findings before reporting to the full Board.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/ Accounting Officer (AO): The CEO is the Trust's most senior leader and is personally responsible to the DfE and Parliament for ensuring money is spent properly and provides value for money. They oversee the Trust's finances and compliance, and advise the Board. They also act as a bank signatory.

Chief Financial Officer (CFO): The CFO leads the Finance Team and makes sure the Trust's finances are well managed day to day. They prepare financial reports, ensure budgets and spending are monitored, and make sure financial rules and deadlines are followed. They also act as a bank signatory.

Chief Infrastructure Officer (CIO): Acts as an authorised bank signatory and is heavily involved in capital planning.

Chief People Office (CPO): Acts as an authorised bank signatory.

Headteachers: Each Headteacher manages their school's budget within the Trust's framework. They authorise spending, ensure policies are followed, and must show that money is used wisely to support pupils.

All Staff: All staff must follow the Trust's procedures, use resources carefully, and report any concerns about misuse of funds.

3. FINANCIAL CONTROLS/IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

Why Our Financial Rules Matter

As a multi-academy trust, we are funded by the Department for Education and must follow the requirements set out in the Academy Trust Handbook. This means our finances are subject to strict rules and regular independent audits. To stay compliant, we must be able to show clear records of how every pound of public money is spent. That's why we ask staff to keep receipts, declare any potential conflicts of interest, and follow our finance procedures carefully.

Register of Interests

- A central Register of Interests is maintained by the Head of Governance and published on the Trust's website.
- If you are involved in decisions about spending, recruitment, or contracts, you must declare any personal or family interests that could influence your judgement.
- Declarations are made when you join, updated annually, and whenever circumstances change.
- Always declare an interest at a meeting if it relates to what's being discussed. Declarations made at meetings will be included in the minutes along with any actions taken as a result of the conflict.

Related Party Transactions

- The Trust has strict rules on buying goods or services from businesses connected to staff, Trustees, or their families.
- Purchases should be made at 'no more than cost'.
- These must always be reported, approved, and properly documented before going ahead and where contracts exceed £40,000 in value, require DfE approval.
- You should never authorise or arrange a purchase that could personally benefit you or someone close to you.

Gifts and Hospitality

- In accordance with the Bribery Act 2010, staff must not accept gifts or hospitality that could influence (or appear to influence) your decisions.
- Anything worth more than £50 must be reported to the CFO so it can be entered into the Gifts and Hospitality Register which is reviewed periodically by the Finance Committee.
- When in doubt, declare it.

Fraud and Whistleblowing

- All staff are expected to act with honesty and integrity.
- If you suspect fraud, misuse of funds, or unethical behaviour, report it to your line manager, the CFO, CEO, or Chair of Trustees. You can also use the Whistleblowing Policy to raise concerns confidentially.
- Concerns raised in good faith will always be taken seriously and investigated.
- The Trust's Whistleblowing Policy provides protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- Any confirmed fraud of £500 or more must be reported to the DfE.

4. FUNDING AND BUDGETING

The Girls' Learning Trust is primarily funded by the Department for Education (DfE). Funding is determined through the national funding formula, which considers factors such as pupil numbers and local cost adjustments. Additional income comes from specific grants, including Pupil Premium and the 16–19 Bursary, which must be spent for their designated purposes. The Trust also receives a small capital allocation each year for buildings and site improvements, alongside limited income from activities such as lettings, fundraising, and local authority grants.

Each year, the Trust aims to set a budget that delivers an annual 3% surplus, enabling reinvestment in schools and support for IT infrastructure and future estates projects.

Budgeting Approach

The Trust uses a combination of zero-based and iterative budgeting. Zero-based budgeting starts from scratch, requiring justification for every cost, and is generally applied to one-off projects.

Iterative budgeting rolls forward the previous year's plan with adjustments for current priorities and is commonly used for staffing and recurring costs.

Responsibilities

Budgeting involves several levels of responsibility:

- Trust Board & Finance Committee – approve the annual budget and monitor financial performance.
- Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – holds overall accountability for the Trust's finances.
- Chief Financial Officer (CFO) – leads the budget-setting process and manages central Trust budgets.
- Headteachers – manage school-specific budgets.
- Budget Holders – oversee designated areas of expenditure, supported by the Finance Team.

As a publicly funded organisation, the Trust is ultimately accountable to the DfE for the appropriate use of all funds.

Budgeting Timeline

The annual budgeting process follows a structured timeline:

- March – Finance Committee approves the budgeting framework, key assumptions, and financial targets.
- April–May – CFO and Headteachers consult with school leaders and review pupil data.
- June–July – Draft budgets are reviewed by the CEO and Executive Team before approval by the Finance Committee and Trust Board, and submission to the DfE.

Curriculum Budgets

Curriculum budgets are allocated using a formula based on prior-year expenditure, adjusted for inflation and student numbers. This ensures subject areas have sufficient resources to deliver high-quality teaching and learning.

Budgets typically cover:

- Classroom resources (e.g., textbooks, software licences, stationery)
- Practical materials for hands-on subjects (e.g., chemicals, art supplies, PE equipment)
- Membership of professional associations (e.g., Royal Geographical Society)
- Specialist equipment maintenance (e.g., fume cupboards, DT machinery)
- Photocopying and reprographic charges (based on actual usage)

Heads of Department are responsible for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their budgets, with support from Headteachers and the Finance Team. All spending must align with curriculum intent, value-for-money principles, and the school's Strategic Development Plan (SDP).

Capital Budget

The capital budget supports long-term projects, including buildings, IT infrastructure, and large equipment. It is planned on a three-year cycle and led by the Chief Infrastructure Officer, in collaboration with Headteachers.

Accessing Budgets

Budget holders can access their budgets via the PS Financials Finance Portal. Training and a user guide are available from the Finance Team, with refresher and group sessions offered throughout the year.

5. PURCHASING

The Trust is committed to ensuring the best value for money in all its purchases. This means obtaining goods and services of the right quality and quantity, at the best price available, while protecting the integrity of public funds.

As a publicly funded organisation, we must follow three core principles:

- Probity: No corruption or private gain in any purchases.
- Accountability: All expenditure must be transparent and justifiable.
- Fairness: Suppliers and stakeholders are treated equitably.

These principles are not optional – they reflect our obligations under the *Academies Trust Handbook* and the requirement for independent external audit. This is why staff are asked to keep receipts, provide supporting documents, and follow the correct processes.

Segregation of Duties

To prevent fraud and error, no one person should control all stages of a purchase.

- Staff may raise requisitions for goods or services.
- Budget holders approve the request.
- The Finance Team issues the purchase order and arranges payment.

This ensures transparency and proper checks.

Routine Purchasing

- All purchases must be raised through the PS Financials Portal before any order is placed.
- Budget holders are responsible for ensuring funds are available within their delegated authority.
- The Finance Team will check budget codes and authorise the purchase order before sending it to the supplier.
- For suppliers not on the approved list, budget holders should consult the Finance Team to confirm best value.

Timescales for Purchase Orders (POs)

- Allow 5 working days for requisitions to be approved and a PO issued.
- Larger or complex orders may take longer, so plan ahead.
- All orders require a purchase order to be raised.

New Suppliers and One-Off Payments

- If a supplier is not already in the system, provide Finance with contact details and, if possible, a quotation.
- Supplier setup can take up to 10 working days depending on required information (bank details, checks).
- For suppliers unlikely to be used again (e.g., guest speakers, one-off contractors), speak to Finance first. A miscellaneous payment form may be used instead of a full supplier setup.

Engaging Contractors

Where purchase order relating to engaging individual contractors (e.g., consultants), it's important that HR are notified at an early stage, this enables them to conduct necessary checks and confirm employment status.

Online Purchases

- All online purchases must follow the same approval process: raise a requisition first.
- Where online payment is required, a school charge card may be used, but pre-approval from the budget holder and Finance is needed.
- Personal cards should not be used unless unavoidable; reimbursement cannot be guaranteed without prior approval.
- Keep order confirmations and receipts, and send to Finance.

VAT

- All purchase orders must be raised net of VAT in the Finance Portal.
- The Finance Team is responsible for obtaining official VAT invoices from suppliers.
- For staff expense claims, receipts or supporting documentation must be attached, otherwise VAT cannot be reclaimed, and reimbursement may be delayed or reduced.

Tendering and Quotation Requirements

To ensure value for money and compliance with the Procurement Act 2024:

- Low-value purchases (up to £10,000): at least 2 quotations.
- Intermediate purchases (£10,000–£50,000): at least 3 written quotations.
- High-value purchases (over £50,000): formal tendering process (aggregate value over contract term must be considered).

Exceptions (e.g. limited suppliers, urgent need, continuation with existing provider) require CFO approval. Exceptions over £75,000 must be approved jointly by the CFO and CEO.

Generally, services and contracts should be market-tested every three years.

Assets and Inventory

- Any equipment costing £500 or more must be recorded on the Trust's Asset Register.
- Heads of Department, IT, and Premises Teams maintain inventories.
- All items must be marked as Trust property.
- An independent check of the inventory is carried out annually.
- Staff must not dispose of equipment independently – disposal or resale must be approved by the CFO and recorded by the Finance Team.

Receiving Goods and Services

- The requisitioner or budget holder must submit a Goods Receipt Note (GRN) in the Portal within 5 working days of receiving goods or services.
- Any discrepancies or returns must be reported to the Finance Team immediately.
- Invoices without GRNs over 10 working days old will be *automatically* processed for payment

Invoices and Payments

- Invoices are processed weekly by the Finance Team via BACS.
- Most suppliers are paid on 30-day terms.

- Direct debits are only permitted for certain categories (utilities, rates, leases, fuel cards, TV licences).
- Non-order invoices are only accepted for limited categories (utilities, supply cover, emergency works, legal fees). Anything else must have CFO approval.

Fuel Cards

Star Fuel Cards are only issued at Wallington and are managed by the Premises Team for use with the school minibuses. Key rules:

- Maximum spend of £150 per transaction on petrol/diesel.
- Cards cannot be used for other items.
- Purchases must correspond to the named vehicle/minibus registered to that card.
- Cards are valid at a variety of local petrol stations.

6. TRIPS

Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC) is responsible for approving trips, overseeing finances, risk assessments and Trip Coordinators support them with trip set up/management of budgets.

When organising a trip or event that requires contributions from students or parents, staff must contact the Finance Team or the Trips Coordinator before making any arrangements or purchasing resources. All events requiring payment will be set up and made available through the ParentPay portal to ensure secure and accurate collection of funds.

Purchasing Travel Tickets

Travel tickets for trips should be purchased online via the Group TFL travel link and sent to the school for distribution by the Visit Leader. Staff should provide at least 10 working days' notice to allow sufficient time for ordering and delivery. The Trips Coordinator should be consulted when planning ticket purchases.

Emergency Funds for Trips

For residential or overseas trips, staff may require emergency funds. Prepaid Caxton cards are provided for this purpose and issued to the Visit Leader. These may be used for cash withdrawals and payments while on official school trips. Receipts for purchases must be retained for audit purposes.

- Larger trips may be credited with up to £1,000 per card.
- Cards must be requested at least 10 working days in advance.
- Funds can be provided in multiple currencies if required.

Trip Budgeting

A financial planning sheet must be prepared for each trip or event. All trips must be fully costed and self-funding. To avoid overcharging parents or creating the need for refunds, contingencies should not be factored into plans. Budgets should however include a 5% administrative fee to cover some of the direct operational costs incurred by the Trust in supporting trips, including bank charges, insurance, platforms like Evolve, provision of mobile phones.

The Enrichment Team should liaise with the Finance Team early in the planning process to discuss:

- Financial planning including payment due dates
- Foreign currency requirements
- Emergency fund requirements

Refund Policy:

- Surpluses over 5% or £20 per student will be refunded to families; smaller amounts will not
- Any remaining surplus or deficits from trips will be managed within the School budgets.

7. INSURANCE

The Trust is insured through the London Borough of Sutton. Insurance coverage includes the necessary protection for assets, and the Trust must ensure it has appropriate insurance for all assets and activities. Arrangements are reviewed annually.

Where the needs for claims arise, the CFO and Financial Controller are responsible for liaising with the insurance provider, logging claims and ensuring recovery of costs.

8. CASH

The Trust operates a cashless system wherever possible, and petty cash is not held. Payments for trips, tickets, and other school activities should be made via the ParentPay portal.

Collecting Cash in Schools

In exceptional circumstances—such as charity fundraising or non-uniform days—cash may be collected. The Finance Team must be informed in advance so arrangements can be made for secure counting and banking.

Staff and students should remain security conscious when handling cash, especially in public areas such as foyers or at events.

Cash handling process:

1. The event organiser performs the first count and records the total on a cash counting sheet.
2. The amount is signed into the banking book and securely stored in the school safe.
3. The Finance Team conducts a second count before G4S collects the cash for banking.
4. All money moving in or out of the safe, including related documentation, must be logged in the safe record book.

Accepting Card Payments

Where appropriate, schools can also accept payments via card readers, which are available from the Finance Team as an alternative to cash collection.

Safe Access

Access to school safes is carefully controlled. Staff with safe keys are:

- Nonsuch – Purchase to Pay Team
- Wallington – Headteacher's PA and Purchase to Pay Team
- Carshalton – Headteacher's PA and Purchase to Pay Team

All items placed in or removed from the safe must be counted and documented in the Record Book. Any cash collected is first counted and recorded by the Finance Team, then verified by a second Finance staff member. Entries should specify whether funds are to be credited to a Trust account or donated to charity.

G4S provides half-termly cash collection from the Trust shared office (based at Nonsuch), coordinated by the Finance Team.

9. ADDITIONAL SCHOOL INCOME

Staff should **notify the Finance Team** if they receive or collect **any income** (e.g., grants, competition awards, exams, music/art contributions) so it can be correctly recorded against the school and cost centre.

10. STAFF EXPENSES

The Trust operates a clear Expenses Policy that sets out what can and cannot be claimed by staff, governors, and trustees. Routine purchases must be processed through the Finance Department. All claims must be submitted electronically within one calendar month of receipt/journey date via the Payroll Helpdesk with supporting receipts and must be authorised by the budget holder, or in the case that you are the budget holder, your line manager.

Payment of Expenses

Expenses are reimbursed weekly via BACS during term-time. Claims submitted during school holidays may take longer to process. All payments are made to the same bank account used for payroll. Changes to payroll bank accounts must be requested via Every HR and confirmed in person by school staff. Payroll enquiries should be directed to payrollhelpdesk@girlslearningtrust.org. All payments will be made to the bank account provided and confirmed by the claimant on the updated staff expense claim form.

Travel Expenses

Staff should normally purchase their own travel tickets (e.g., train, tube) for courses or events and claim reimbursement promptly. Estimated travel costs should be included on the Training Form when attending training. Travel costs are charged to the Training & Development (ATAD) budget. Petrol or diesel claims are reimbursed at the standard rate of 45p per mile. Car hire may be claimed only in exceptional circumstances where public transport is not feasible. Parking or speeding fines will not be reimbursed.

Taxi Usage

The Trust maintains accounts with local taxi companies:

- Nonsuch: Movr, Wallington Cabs & Courier
- Wallington: Wallington Cars
- Carshalton: Wallington Cars

Use of taxi accounts requires authorisation by the Headteacher or relevant senior staff and a requisition raised in the Finance Portal. In emergencies (e.g., accompanying a sick student to hospital), taxis may be booked automatically via Reception with verbal confirmation from the Headteacher.

Prohibited Expenses

No alcohol may be purchased using Trust funds or donated income.

11. CATERING & DUTY MEALS

Catering for school events may be arranged with Headteacher approval. This usually covers sandwiches and small items for visitors or guests. Staff duty meals may also be authorised in specific circumstances, such as:

- Staff supervising lunchtime duties
- Staff running lunchtime enrichment clubs

12. PAYROLL

Salaries are paid monthly by BACS on the 28th of each month into your nominated bank account.

Staff are automatically enrolled in the correct pension scheme:

- Teachers: Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS)
- Support Staff: Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS)

Any member of staff wishing to opt out of the pension scheme upon auto-enrolment can do so by submitting an opt-out form within three months of enrolment. All contributions made during this period will be refunded.

Payslips and payroll documents are available online via the EPM Payslip Portal. A link to the ePayslips portal is emailed to each staff member once their first payslip has been issued.

If you notice an error in your pay or have a payroll queries, contact payrollhelpdesk@girlslearningtrust.org.

Other points:

- Statutory deductions (income tax, National Insurance, and pension contributions) are applied automatically.
- Tax codes are supplied to our payroll provider by HMRC via a secure portal. If you have any queries regarding your tax code, please contact HMRC directly.
- It is the responsibility of each staff member to review their payslips regularly to ensure that all payments, deductions, and personal details are accurate. Any discrepancies should be reported to the Payroll Helpdesk promptly.
- If your bank account details change, please contact our HR team hr@girlslearningtrust.org. They will guide you through the necessary steps to update your information and notify the payroll team accordingly.
- If your address has changed, please ensure that Every is updated and notify Payroll as soon as possible.
- Cycle to Work Scheme forms part of our employee benefits package. The scheme enables staff to obtain a bicycle and safety accessories for commuting purposes through a salary sacrifice arrangement, allowing savings on income tax, National Insurance, and pension contributions. For more information, please contact Payroll Helpdesk on payrollhelpdesk@girlslearningtrust.org.