



Girls' Learning Trust

INVITATION TO TENDER
External Auditors

CONTEXT

The Girls' Learning Trust (GLT) invite tenders for our external audit work. We currently operate three large secondary schools located in the London Borough of Sutton but are exploring growth opportunities:

- Carshalton High School for Girls
- Nonsuch High School for Girls
- Wallington High School for Girls

Our business, in common with other state funded multi academy trusts is both a company limited by guarantee and an exempt charity. We have a turnover totalling approximately £35 million, approximately 500 staff and around 4,500 students. We have a shared finance team that works across all schools in the Trust. We are supported by a dedicated team of Members, Trustees and Governors.

Our current auditors were appointed in the summer of 2018 and retained following a tender process in 2022. In line with best practice, we are now undertaking a further competitive tender process to ensure we have best value for the organisation.

More information on our governance can be found here: www.girlslearningtrust.org/our-governance

Our latest accounts and other key documents can be found here: www.girlslearningtrust.org/our-governance/key-reports

SERVICES REQUIRED

The Trust is seeking proposals from suitably qualified firms to provide the following external audit and related services.

1. Annual Audit and Statutory Accounts

- External audit of the Trust's annual financial statements in accordance with the Academies Accounts Direction and applicable auditing standards
- Regularity audit and assurance report for inclusion in the Trust's Annual Report and Accounts
- Preparation of the Trust's Annual Report and Financial Statements
- Completion and submission of the Academies Accounts Return to the Department for Education (DfE)

2. Budget Forecast Return (BFR)

- Support with the preparation and/or review of the Trust's Budget Forecast Return, where required

3. Legacy Companies

- Preparation of statutory accounts for any legacy companies within the Trust structure
- Advice and support in relation to the orderly winding-up of such entities, as required

4. Teachers' Pensions

- Audit and certification of the Teachers' Pension End of Year Certificate

5. Taxation and VAT

- Corporation tax compliance services
- Provision of tax and VAT advice and support, as required

Contract Term

Subject to satisfactory performance in terms of quality, compliance, and value for money, the Trust intends to award a contract for an initial three-year period, with an annual review and a formal re-tender or extension decision at the end of that term.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All tenders will be evaluated using the following five criteria with the weighting for each specified:

Quality and Delivery of Services (30%)

Please describe how your firm would provide the services as requested, including:

- Your proposed approach to delivering the full range of services set out in this tender, including statutory audit, regularity assurance and associated reporting requirements
- Your proposed audit methodology, including your approach to planning, risk assessment, and the setting and application of materiality
- Your proposed annual audit timetable, including key milestones and reporting deadlines
- Your proposed approach to communication with the Trust, including arrangements for regular updates and escalation of issues
- How you will ensure appropriate separation of duties, auditor independence, and robust quality control arrangements
- How your firm would support the Trust as it grows or becomes more complex, including changes in scale, structure or regulatory requirements

Audit delivery model:

- Whether you propose an interim audit visit and, if so:
 - The scope of work to be undertaken at interim stage
 - The rationale for this approach
 - How this would reduce pressure on the final audit
- The Trust is open to either an interim and final audit model or a final-only approach; tenderers should clearly explain their preferred model and why it represents best value and effectiveness for the Trust
- The Trust's preference is that, wherever possible, audit work is undertaken remotely, making effective use of secure digital systems and virtual meetings. Tenderers should explain:
 - Which elements of the audit would be completed remotely
 - Which elements would require on-site attendance, and why

Information requirements and preparedness:

- How your firm will ensure the Trust receives clear, comprehensive information in advance of each audit phase, including:
 - Detailed schedules and information requests
 - Timings and deadlines
 - Expected involvement of Trust staff
 - Format and method of submission
- Tenderers are encouraged to include example audit request lists, timetables or planning documents as part of their submission

Added value:

- Any added services and/or benefits offered by your firm, where these do not compromise auditor independence

Track Record and Relevant Experience (15%)

Please provide details of your firm's experience of providing external audit services to academy trusts and multi-academy trusts, including:

- The number of academies and/or Multi-Academy Trusts that you currently act for
- The typical size and profile of your academy trust audit clients, including:
 - Average number of academies per trust
 - Typical annual turnover range

- Any material common features (e.g. growth through transfer, mixed primary/secondary provision, geographic spread)

In addition, please provide details of three reference multi-academy trusts of a size and complexity broadly comparable to our Trust. For each reference, please include:

- A brief case study outlining the nature of the trust and the services provided
- The length of the audit relationship
- Contact details for the Accounting Officer (CEO / Executive Principal)

Relationship and Experience with the DfE (10%)

Please confirm that your firm has experience of undertaking external audit work in compliance with the DfE's Academy Trust Handbook and the Academies Accounts Direction.

In addition, please:

- Describe your firm's experience of working with the DfE in its regulatory capacity, including routine interactions arising from statutory audit and regularity assurance work
- Provide assurance that your firm maintains a constructive and professional working relationship with the DfE
- Disclose any material disputes, regulatory issues, or differences of audit opinion that are currently in open discussion with the DfE, to the extent this can be done without breaching client confidentiality

Note: Information relating to the size, scale, or composition of your academy trust client base should be provided under "Track Record and Relevant Experience".

Fee Proposal and Value for Money (30%)

Please itemise proposed costs for each of the services outlined in this tender.

The proposed contract would take effect from the financial year 1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026 and is offered for an initial three-year period.

Please provide:

- A fixed fee proposal for each year of the initial three-year contract term, based on the Trust's current size and structure
- Clear details of any assumptions, exclusions, or circumstances that may give rise to additional charges, including material changes such as significant growth, mergers, or changes in regulatory requirements

Additional Governance and Compliance Information (Non-scored, mandatory)

Tenderers must provide details of the following:

- Insurance and professional indemnity arrangements
- Compliance with data protection legislation and GDPR, including arrangements to support secure remote working
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements
- Confirmation of compliance with the FRC Ethical Standard, including auditor independence and partner rotation requirements
- Arrangements for cooperation and professional handover to successor auditors at the end of the contract term

APPLICATION INFORMATION

Please submit your tender as a **single, consolidated PDF document**, clearly structured in the order set out below.

1. Executive Summary

(Supports all evaluation criteria)

Provide a brief overview of your proposal, including:

- Your firm's suitability for appointment as external auditor to the Trust
- Key differentiators and strengths of your proposal
- How your firm will add value to the Trust while maintaining auditor independence

2. Quality and Delivery of Services: Approach, Methodology and Services on Offer

(Evaluation Criterion: Quality and Delivery of Services – 30%)

Provide a detailed explanation of how you would deliver the services, including:

- Proposed audit approach, methodology, and timetable, including planning, reporting, and communication arrangements
- Approach to setting and applying materiality
- Key audit and regularity risks for a growing multi-academy trust
- Arrangements for separation of duties, independence, and quality control
- How your approach supports the Trust as it grows or becomes more complex
- Interim vs. final audit visits (if applicable), and which work would be done remotely versus on-site
- How the Trust will receive clear advance information on required schedules, documents, and staff involvement
- Optional: example audit request lists or planning documents

3. Track Record, People and Relevant Experience (including engagement with the DfE)

(Evaluation Criteria: Track Record and Relevant Experience – 15%; People and Leadership – 15%; Relationship and Experience with the DfE – 10%)

Provide summary details of your firm's experience in auditing academy trusts and MATs of comparable size and complexity, including:

- Proposed audit team for the Trust, including roles, qualifications, experience, and areas of expertise, with confirmation of availability and continuity
- Typical client base, including number of academies/MATs, average size, turnover range, and common features relevant to this Trust
- Three reference MATs of broadly comparable size and complexity, including:
 - Brief case study of services provided
 - Length of audit relationship
 - Contact details for the Accounting Officer (CEO / Executive Principal)
- Experience working with the DfE, including compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook and Academies Accounts Direction
- Disclosure of any material disputes, regulatory issues, or differences of audit opinion currently under discussion with the DfE

4. Fee Proposal and Value for Money

(Evaluation Criterion: Fee Proposal and Value for Money – 30%)

Provide a clear and transparent fee proposal, including:

- Anticipated number of days required to provide an effective external audit for a trust of this size
- Total cost of the comprehensive service, broken down by constituent parts

- Fixed fee proposal for each year of the initial three-year contract term, based on the Trust's current size and structure, with clear assumptions, exclusions, or circumstances that could give rise to additional charges
- Daily rates for any additional work outside the agreed scope

Optional / Non-scored Additions

Tenderers are also requested to provide, in a separate section:

- Insurance and professional indemnity arrangements
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements
- Data protection / GDPR compliance, particularly for remote audit work
- Confirmation of compliance with FRC Ethical Standard and auditor independence requirements
- Arrangements for professional handover to a successor auditor at the end of the contract term

Application Deadline

The deadline for submissions is 9am on Wednesday 8th April.

Please send your submissions to lfunnell@girlslearningtrust.org.

Shortlisting

Shortlisting will take place on Monday 13th April. Firms successful at this stage will be invited to interview.

Interviews

Interviews will take place on Monday 20th April in person at Nonsuch High School for Girls. This will involve a 10-minute presentation and a series of structured questions from the panel. We will try to accommodate timing preferences, but we won't be able to offer an alternative date.

The interview panel will comprise:

- Chris Chant (Chair Trust Finance Committee)
- Andrea Cooke (Trustee)
- Members x 2
- Tom Flynn (CEO and Accounting Officer)
- Lucie Funnell (Chief Financial Officer) – in attendance to support
- Megan Mannion (Head of Governance) – in attendance to support

Appointment Process

In accordance with the Trust's Articles of Association and the Academy Trust Handbook, the external auditors will be formally appointed by the Members of the Trust, following a recommendation from the Board of Trustees.

The recommendation will be informed by the tender evaluation process and, where applicable, interviews conducted by the appointed panel.

FURTHER CONTACT DETAILS

Lucie Funnell BA FCA
 Chief Financial Officer
 Girls' Learning Trust
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