

VASCA BID GUIDANCE

Background

Every year the Education Service receives bids for Voluntary Aided School Condition Allocation (VASCA) which far exceed the allocated total. The Diocesan allocation received from the DfE is based on a fixed amount per pupil at each VA establishment as reported in February before the final allocation is made. Various weighting factors are introduced in the DfE calculation: secondary pupils are weighted at 1.5, post-16 at 2.0; the SCA condition band factors reflect the condition data collection for schools across the diocese, from 0.5 upwards; voluntary aided schools cannot reclaim VAT, so their SCA is increased by 8%; a location factor is also applied to reflect regional variations in cost. There is also a 'funding floor' which guarantees that the SCA per school will not fall below a certain level. Schools which have academised and joined either Bosco or Xavier are not part of this calculation because they are allocated funding from a separate SCA pot, which is controlled by the relevant trust.

The funding is not given to each school as received, but in the interest of the Common Good the total SCA funding across the diocese is pooled and administered by the Education Service and allocated to particular schools on a need's basis, and the annual bidding process is the only measure against which this is judged. Bids should be submitted by the autumn half term and are then reviewed by a panel consisting of the Estates Officer, Director of Education, Deputy Director of Education, and several head teachers representing the diversity of schools across the Diocese. This panel meets once a year to review the bids, in the interests of fairness bids that are late may be assessed more stringently.

The Education Service cannot fund all of the project bids that it receives and inevitably the 'nice to have' projects are less likely to be successful. In the interests of offering support to the widest selection of schools you may be requested to consider phasing, or possibly partial funding of your project. The panel has very little time to review bids which are provisionally ranked by the Estates Officer. Your bid needs to explain the need for your project as clearly and succinctly as possible and to build a case that can be supported by

the panel. A well explained, suitably justified bid is more likely to be successful. This guidance will help you to produce a more effective bid for VASCA funding.

The VASCA funding spreadsheet has been developed to assist in the bid process, tender sign-off, and claims process. This process only works if the form is filled out correctly, the contact details, bank account details and tender returns must be filled in correctly¹. The form includes a declaration from the head teacher and chair of governors that the governing body can provide 10%. By law the VASCA funding can contribute no more than 90% of the cost of a project. The Education Service requires a statement showing the total governor fund, the quantum of Devolved Formula Capital Grant, and the timescale for expenditure to accompany the bid. The level of funds held by the governing body should be clear and any other funding being sought externally or offered by the school through targeted fund raising, for instance.

VASCA is central government funding and, as such, must comply with the requirements of public procurement legislation, demonstrating best value². The VASCA funding level is only finalised by the DfE in April, and monies are released to the Diocese in four tranches in late May, mid-June, mid-July and mid-August. Large VASCA payments cannot be made to schools until the commensurate funds are received by the Diocese.

Budgeting

Schools should seek at least three tenders for projects to compare prices, bear in mind that in addition to the cost of building work and VAT, the diocesan administration fee is 1% against each claim; and professional fees will typically be in the order of 10-14% for small projects; you should always include a contingency sum in your budget³, depending on the scale of the project 10% would usually be a reasonable allowance.

Responsible Body

The Governing Body is responsible for the maintenance of the school. As such, contracts for works on the school buildings and grounds are between the governing body and the chosen contractor. The Education Service allocates central government funding where it can for these works, but their execution, and the timely payment of invoices, is exclusively the responsibility of the governors. VASCA funding for a project is released by the Estates Officer in response to invoices submitted as part of a claim; without a matching invoice no monies can be released. Ideally the governors should hold sufficient funds to honour

¹ Errors will lead to delays in the payment of claims. There has been a dramatic increase in invoice fraud, and the Diocesan finance team will double check before transferring funds.

² The new Public Procurement Act enables commissioning bodies to consider social as well as monetary value.

³ Projects rarely run exactly to plan, and unknowns can add greatly to the cost. An 'optimistic' budget is not helpful.

invoices before VASCA funding is transferred, so please talk to the Estates Officer if a large invoice is pending and this is not possible.

The Estates Officer can offer limited advice to schools, but the retention of a professional architect, project manager, or surveyor should always be considered, especially to support the health and safety obligations of the governing body⁴ as the 'employer' for the purposes of the contract. A professional consultant will support the school in defining the project scope, tendering the project, certifying that works have been completed to the correct standard, and in administering the VASCA claims process. You must appoint a Principal Designer (and Principal Contractor) for almost all construction projects - if you are not appointing a consultant, you must ensure that the contractor also acts as Principal Designer as well, some may resist this request.

Condition Rating

The primary criterion for allocating VASCA funds is the condition rating associated with the project. The scheme grades condition from A (Good) to D (Bad) and priority from 1 (Immediate) to 4 (More than 5 years). An item that is graded D1 is in the worst condition and is the highest priority and therefore is most likely to receive funding via the diocese. These ratings are typically extracted from the Condition Data Collection (CDC) programme, which was started by the ESFA in 2017. This programme has been superseded by CDC 2 which runs between 2021 and 2026, this will provide a condition snapshot for the school estate in England. However, this process is not foolproof, and condition issues are still missed, it is the duty of the Responsible Body to be aware of current and upcoming condition issues on its estate and to plan accordingly⁵. A robust, proactive maintenance regime can mitigate the need for future VASCA projects. The Estates Officer will be looking for evidence of a planned preventative maintenance regime for the school estate to understand how your current bid relates to planned future works.

Visual Evidence

A picture is worth a thousand words. Help the panel to understand your project by including photos and if necessary annotated plans, so that the severity, nature, location and scope can be easily understood.

⁴ Recent HSE prosecutions have resulted in large fines for education governing bodies where contractors have not been adequately vetted and monitored.

⁵ Schools are encouraged to read [Good estate management for schools - Guidance - GOV.UK](#), [Occupation of School Premises](#), [Notes to Accompany Occupation of School Premises](#), and the Diocesan School Buildings Handbook, available at W: abdiocese.org.uk/education/school-business-buildings

Statement of Need

Briefly explain why this project is important to the delivery of a safe, comfortable and dry environment for your pupils. Give examples of the way in which the building issue has impacted the functioning of the school that make it clear why the project is essential to delivering an excellent educational experience.

Delivery

Please explain how your project will be delivered, either outside term time, or through partial closure of the school or grounds to staff and pupils. Phased delivery may be necessary depending on the size and complexity of the project and contingency plans are often required for projects that run over programme. Roofing projects in particular are dictated by weather conditions and wet summers can put programmes at risk.

The Bid Prioritisation Process

The panel applies the following ranking criteria when assessing bids:

1. Health and safety and basic DDA provision.
2. Condition issues which would result in the closure of a school (e.g. failed boilers, leaking roofs etc)
3. Other condition issues.
4. Suitability improvements where existing buildings are a barrier to delivery of the curriculum.
5. Suitability improvements which would have a positive impact on the running of the school

Bids must be submitted before the autumn half term; the panel meets around four weeks after bids are received to agree prioritisation. Project approvals and funding levels are agreed **in principle** before Christmas for the following year and schools are notified. VASCA funding provides very little leeway, and the Diocese has no additional funds to offer. If tender returns subsequently come in over budget, or the project cost increases due to unforeseen circumstances then please talk to the Estates Officer as soon as possible. In any event schools must **send tender returns to the Education Service for final approval** before placing orders for work or entering into contracts. Schools may be asked to reduce the scope of the project, or phase it over more than one year; it is appreciated that the overall cost of the project may increase as a consequence. It is acknowledged that emergency projects may emerge after the formal funding application process, a contingency percentage is always set aside to deal with these situations. However, these projects should be the exception rather than the rule. A school which is actively engaged in a planned maintenance regime should experience fewer unpleasant surprises.

Your Bid

Schools should submit the accurately completed VASCA spreadsheet which can be downloaded [here](#), in conjunction with the bid supporting information pack, a proforma for which is available on the School Business & Buildings page of the website.