

Vantage is a mixed CE Multi Academy Trust (MAT) consisting of six Church of England schools and three community schools.



Trust Profile

Name

Vantage Academy Trust

School Category

Academy

School type

Primary

Pupil roll

3000

Age range of pupils

3 to 11

LA

Bolton

What began as a single academy in 2012, became a MAT in 2014.

Kerry Stanford, the trust's Chief Finance Officer (CFO), began using SBS Budgets in 2018 following a recommendation and demo at the ISBL (Institute of School Business Leaders) Conference. All finance across the MAT is handled by a central team comprising the CFO and assistant CFO. There are no business managers in the individual schools, which ensures the admin tasks carried out by each school within the MAT are kept to a low level, with all orders and invoices handled centrally. In addition, the HR team has read-only access to the product.

The previous budgeting products used by the MAT never fully delivered on promised features and had limitations that negatively impacted on the workload of the central finance team. Kerry chose SBS Budgets because it allows the finance team to import and export actuals which meant they could easily track against budgets and identify any variances.

While performing monthly checks using the old products used to be a chore, the process has become much easier.

"I find the SBS Budgets product flexible and very easy to use," Kerry explains. "I like the function of the payroll import because it means I can easily see any over or underpayments at a quick glance, while the import of actuals from IRIS Financials (formerly PS Financials) allows me to check against budgets very easily and see if any area is overspent."

The product has helped the finance team manage its expansion of General Annual Grant (GAG) pooling, which involves the central budgeting and pooling of expenditure common to all of the MAT's schools. "The work we have undertaken with GAG pooling and how the budgets work has been really helpful and as we continue to expand this area it allows me to track both GAG spend and the separate school spend easily. We also use the Budget Forecast Return Output (BFRO) report which gives us an easy baseline from which to start. The GAG monitor and Multi GAG monitor function are vital to us."

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The product's scalability has already been proven. The MAT has expanded from six to nine schools since SBS Budgets was introduced and Kerry is confident that SBS Budgets will easily handle further expansion, explaining that there are plans to bring on board a secondary school. “As we look to grow with the addition of our secondary arm, we are looking at Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning (ICFP) which will allow us to look at where we might be able to make savings in staffing as the school is currently very highly staffed. This would also be useful for our primary schools, as we currently do this on a spreadsheet.”

The present system used in the secondary school requires the manual entry of actuals and payroll for 150 staff members, which would have huge time implications for Kerry. Bringing the school into the Vantage Academies Trust and moving its budgeting operations to SBS Budgets will make this process much easier and less time-consuming. As Kerry says: “I can CSV it, import it, and then check for any mismatches.”

As Kerry has emphasised, SBS Budgets is easy to use. Initial training was carried out by the SBS team, while “ongoing support has been very helpful”, including where additional features have been used. She adds: “I feel that should we have to train more staff they would easily pick up what they need to know.”

In fact, Kerry has been so impressed with SBS Budgets she has recommended it to colleagues in other MATs who “have now also bought the system”. She has shared her experiences with potential users at ISBL conferences.

To find out more about SBS Budgets, contact the team on **0345 222 1551 • Opt 5** or email hello@schoolbusinessservices.co.uk

schoolbusinessservices.co.uk