

All Hallows Catholic College cluster

Theme 6: Joint procurement savings from purchase or renegotiation of a contract

Theme 9: Financial, audit and management control improvements leading to savings or improved reporting and compliance

Theme 13: Multiple-site working – how the CBM organises time/practicalities in working week/ how they build relationships across a group

The All Hallows Catholic College cluster incorporates 8 schools, with 7 primaries and 1 secondary (high school). The schools are based in Macclesfield, Cheshire. The MAT was formed on 1 January 2013, initially with only the High School converting and then on 1 April 2015, 3 of the primary schools also converted and joined the MAT. Within each of the partner primary schools, there is a School Business Manager (CBM). The cluster CBM (CBM) works 18 hours per week, and coordinates with the business managers within the 7 schools.

When talking with the CBM, it was apparent that the role has involved an immense amount of data-gathering and fact finding, as well as leading and managing on contract work, setting up new projects and overall collaborative working.

One of the first priorities of the CBM was to gather information from all the schools on their current contracts and to establish a contracts register. This has now been completed and it can easily be seen which contracts are due for renewal across the partnership. It has also highlighted that the contract dates differ within each school and the CBM is looking to eventually align all the contract end dates which will provide ease in managing the services and also enhance potential for procurement savings across the cluster when re-negotiating or choosing new suppliers.

The CBM was involved in the negotiation on photocopying contracts across the partnership. Most of the schools also had photocopier contracts which required renewal and the schools were dissatisfied with the service and quality of their existing machines. A contract was initially negotiated for the whole cluster with a supplier, where savings of £17,628 could be made and a better system of management i.e. 'Follow Me Printing' could be established. As each school's contracts dates with their existing supplier terminated, the new machines were installed. However, when it came to putting in the new machines in the High School, it was found that the company were not able to supply the machines necessary and so the High School had to take out a contract with another company which were able to supply what they needed. The High School is more specialised in its printing whereby it has an established 'Print Company' which is used to provide a business income for the school. In three years' time, when the contract is due for renewal, the CBM plans to have one supplier across all schools, with the potential to create further savings.

The CBM has also negotiated HR for the partnership. The High School had outsourced its HR function for some years and its contract was due for renewal. With the inclusion of the 3 primary schools in the MAT, renegotiation included these schools as well. The increased number of purchasers enabled increased economies of scale and a saving of £9,000 across the 4 schools will be made once all the contract renewal dates begin. This will be extended to the rest of the primary schools when they eventually join the MAT and they will be able to enjoy the contractual savings.

The CBM initially completed the Spend Analysis Tool which was provided by the DfE. This revealed that one of the highest spends across the partnership was in supply teachings. As it is difficult to reduce costs from supply agencies, there has been consideration of a project, working alongside the new HR Manager in the High School, to set up a 'bank' of staff to serve across the Trust. This would provide continuity of staffing provision and maximise teacher efficiency and service for the students. The continuity allows for the Catholic ethos to be supported more readily, where this can be an issue with teachers who are employed on a more ad-hoc basis. The Trust would also be in a stronger position to quality control the service.

The schools in the MAT are now also using the same Finance System and are currently setting up a 'SLA' with the High school for assistance with financial services which they previously received from the local authority. This again will be extended across all the schools in the MAT once they have converted.

The CBM has said that there have been learning points along the way. There is a definite need to be flexible, as hours might vary when talking to suppliers for example, in order to fit in with their working hours. In addition, the time it takes to gather that initial information on individual schools contracts was time-consuming and took the initial couple of months of the project to establish. Whilst it was more than worth that time, CBMs need to account for this time.