

Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship for Schools (CMDAS)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (October 2025)

Who is the programme for?

The Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) for Schools is aimed at both new and existing school business managers and directors and those in similar business management or support roles (e.g., Finance Manager, Finance Director, Office Manager, Senior Administrator, Business Support Officer, Bursar, HR Manager, etc.) employed in schools and academies. The CMDA for Schools offers school-based staff in management and leadership positions the opportunity to gain formal recognition of their skills at degree level.

What are the benefits for my school?

Research has shown that apprentices increase innovation and drive quality. The CMDA for Schools will help learners to develop job-specific skills that will benefit the school. Employers offering opportunities for higher level qualifications, such as CMDA for Schools, attract and retain high-calibre individuals with the potential to progress. As part of the programme, apprentices will undertake a project which addresses a genuine issue or opportunity for their school.

How will the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship for Schools benefit me?

Successful apprentices will achieve:

- An Honours Degree in School Business Management (awarded by the University of Gloucestershire)
- On-the-job experience
- A professional pathway for future development
- Level 2 in maths and English (if you do not already have these qualifications)
- Specialist expertise in areas including finance, procurement, HR, leading school effectiveness and school performance data.
- A network of fellow school professionals.

What topics will I study?

The programme comprises of the following modules:

Year 1 / Level 4 modules

Block 1

- SB401 – The School Environment & Business Management
- SB402 – Human Resource Management in Schools

Block 2

- SB403 – Introduction to Managing School Finances
- SB404 – Introduction to Risk Management in Schools

Block 3

- SB405 – Project Management in Schools
- SB406 – School Facility Management

Year 2 / Level 5 modules

Block 4

- SB501 – Operations Management in Schools

- SB503 – School Business Leadership
- Block 5
- SB502 – Professional Development
 - SB505 – Managing School Improvement
- Block 6
- SB504 – Leading School Efficiencies
 - SB506 – Marketing in Schools

Year 3 / Level 6 modules

- Block 7
- SB601 – Enabling Effective Learning in Schools
 - SB606 – School Performance Data
- Block 8
- SB605 – Managing School Projects
 - SB604 – Change Management in Schools
- Block 9
- SB603 – Strategic Financial Management in Schools
 - SB602 – Leading Continuous Professional Development

The programme will develop and examine the knowledge, skills and behaviours of activities associated with the role of school business professionals and in addition to the above modules, the learner will complete a work-based project which addresses genuine challenges within your school.

For further information of what is covered in each module please see the table below.

Level 4	CAT points	Outline
SB401 – The School Environment & Business Management	15	This module develops knowledge and understanding of the school setting and considers the role of the school business professional within the political and organisational context of school business management. It provides an opportunity to establish and evaluate the professional skills of a school business professional and their impact in the school setting.
SB402 – Human Resource Management in Schools	30	The aim of this module is to develop an understanding of the theories, concepts and approaches relating to Human Resources Management and Development in an educational establishment. The module also aims to provide students with an insight into these processes and the ability to engage with and solve HRM issues in a school setting.
SB403 – Introduction to Managing School Finances	30	The module aims to develop understanding of the principles of school financial management and the planning and setting of the school's budget, the management of the school's finance team, and procurement and value for money.
SB404 – Introduction to Risk Management in Schools	15	The module aims to develop knowledge and understanding of the management of risks in schools, including health and safety, fire safety and emergency and contingency planning.

SB405 – Project Management in Schools	15	The focus of this module is on the skills required to lead and manage a development project in a school setting. It covers all the phases in project management and the skills associated with each one. This involves looking at the work involved in identifying, planning, leading, monitoring, closing down and evaluating a project.
SB406 – School Facility Management	15	Facilities management is a significant element of the school business professional role. It is a vital discipline in every school and involves responsibility for the strategic improvement of the school site. Increased devolution of capital funding and responsibility for premises improvements, from local authorities to schools, has changed the school business professional role. School business professionals are expected to take the lead in the physical development of the site, so the module will consider a strategic approach to managing school's premises. The module also aims to develop skills in managing a school's information and communication technology facilities and healthy catering in a school.

Level 5	CAT points	Outline
SB501 – Operations Management in Schools	15	This module focuses on the operational management of the teams that a school business professional is likely to lead. The module discusses the nature of employees in the workplace and develop an understanding of tools and techniques for reviewing team performance and improving the effectiveness of a team.
SB502 – Professional Development	15	The module considers the personal effectiveness skills that underpin the role of a school business professional, the process for the development of those skills and how that process can be evaluated. The topics include ethical, compassionate and value-based leadership, emotional and social intelligence and self-assessment strategies.
SB503 – School Business Leadership	30	The module aims to develop understanding of the theory and practice related to the strategic development of schools and leadership requirements to ensure that the strategic direction meets the required objectives.
SB504 – Leading School Efficiencies	15	This module explores the particular contribution that school business professionals can play in ensuring that strategic decisions taking in their schools is informed by considerations of efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.
SB505 – Managing School Improvement	30	This module explores the meaning of “quality” and “improvement” in an educational context, from a theoretical perspective and from the practical perspective of a school business professional.
SB506 – Marketing in Schools	15	The focus of this module is on the theory and practice of marketing technique, promotional activities and customer relationship management based around the understanding of working with school stakeholders.

Level 6	CATS points	Outline
SB601 – Enabling Effective Learning in Schools	15	The module develops knowledge and understanding of the conditions for effective learning in order to allow the school business professional to play a full role as a strategic leader dedicated to enabling effective learning and teaching across the school.
SB602 - Continuous Professional Development	15	This module delves into the nature of leadership in the role of the School Business Professional.
SB603 - Strategic Financial Management in Schools	30	The purpose of this module is to enable the entrepreneurial school business professional to develop both own and whole-school knowledge and understanding of issues related to probity, equity and the ethics of managing a limited budget which supports student attainment.
SB604 - Change Management in Schools	30	The module develops knowledge and understanding of the data types available when measuring and analysing performance. Students will consider how to manage school data effectively, and how to use it as the cornerstone of any strategy for improving school performance.
SB605 – Managing School Projects	30	The aim of this module is to further develop project management skills for a school to manage the multiple initiatives and projects designed to raise standards, improve efficiency and secure value for money.
SB606 - School Performance Data	15	This module enables the school business professional to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key issues associated with measuring the performance of schools, including how various approaches and particular tools can be used to ensure school accountability based on general government policies.

When will the next programme start?

Please refer to our website for the latest options and start dates at: [Level 6 Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship for Schools \(CMDA\) - Employment, Skills and Training from Serco](#)

What is the cost?

The fee for the three-year CMDA for Schools is £22,000. The training costs are covered as part of the Government Levy, provided your school/academy are contributing to the apprenticeship levy. Your school/employer should have a digital apprentice account or be able to provide us with the contact details for the parent organisation holding the account; this may be the local authority or academy trust for example.

If your employer is non-levy, the apprenticeship can be funded by the employer co-investment scheme. Your employer will be invoiced for 5% of the total cost of the programme and must reserve funds on their Digital Apprenticeship Account to cover the remaining 95%.

Regardless of whether your employer is levy or non-levy, they must be registered on the Government's Digital Apprenticeship Service. Please visit the link below for more information: [Funding an apprenticeship \(apprenticeships.gov.uk\)](https://apprenticeships.gov.uk)

Should you be eligible to fast-track through part of the programme (through the Accreditation of Prior Learning, or APL process) the fee will be reduced accordingly.

How long will it take to complete the programme?

The CMDA for Schools is a 40-month programme although you may be able to fast track through some modules if you have prior knowledge and/or experience. Once you have successfully completed the degree and a portfolio of evidence you will need to complete a one-day assessment centre (end-point assessment or EPA) with an external assessor. This end-point assessment (EPA) should take place within 8-12 weeks of the successful completion of your apprenticeship studies.

What are the entry requirements?

You will be required to demonstrate that you are working at a minimum of Level 2 (same level as GCSE Grade A* - C) in English and maths through the completion of a web-based initial functional skills and diagnostic assessment. If you do not have these qualifications, we can help you gain the Level 2 requirements during your studies. If you already have Level 2 in maths and English qualifications we will need to see your original certificates (you will still need to take the initial and diagnostic assessment).

The apprenticeship is suitable for school business managers and directors and those in similar business and support roles in schools or academies who are responsible for people, projects, operations and/or services to deliver long term organisational success.

It is essential that all applicants have the support of their line manager as the apprenticeship will involve attendance at two-day workshops at the beginning of each block of modules - 18 days over the full three years. Applications will not be accepted without the line manager's full support.

I already have a Level 4 Diploma in School Business Management - does this allow me to fast track through the programme?

If you already have a Level 4 Diploma in SBM you may not need to complete the whole of year 1 of the CMDA for Schools or may even be able to go straight into year 2. You will be given three extra months during the programme to enable you to evidence the CMDA skills that are required for your portfolio of evidence which you would have completed in year 1. NB: Please note that fast-tracking into the CMDA for Schools through meeting eligible APL criteria for Level 4 / Level 5 school business manager (SBM) qualifications only applies to SBM programmes completed over the last 5 years.

Can I use other qualifications at Level 4 to fast track through the CMDA for Schools?

This will depend on the how closely the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of each unit/module of your qualification map to the CMDA for Schools modules. In order to fast track through a module (through APL process) you must be able to evidence that you have met all of the assessment criteria linked to that module. Please contact us for further information about your qualifications.

I have a Level 6 Diploma in SBM - can I 'convert' this to the BA School Business Management?

Under DfE rules you are not eligible to join an apprenticeship if you have similar qualifications at the same level so unfortunately you are not able to convert your Level 6 Diploma to a BA School Business Management.

Can I study the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship for Schools if I already have a degree?

Yes, as long as it is in a different discipline (i.e. not business).

What is the application process?

The application process comprises several stages:

- After submitting an initial Enquiry form, the learner submits an online application form
- The learner completes a skills scan based around the Standard of the apprenticeship applied for
- The learner completes an English and Maths Initial Diagnostic assessment
- The learner provides proof of ID and evidence of Level 2 qualifications in English and Maths
- The learner participates in a remote interview
- The Learner and their line manager sign registration documents

Please note:

- Any applications received after the application deadline for a specific cohort will be considered for the following cohort.
- For cohort planning purposes, we have to apply strict onboarding cut-off points. Any learner not returning signed registration documents by a pre-set deadline will be deferred to following intake. This will apply even if the learner has signed the paperwork but their line manager has not.

What is the time commitment needed from participants?

Throughout the programme, apprentices will build a portfolio which will be supported by 360-degree feedback.

Your employer must allow you 6 hours a week of your normal working hours to complete off-the-job training (which includes face-to-face events, relevant meetings, projects, updating your portfolio, etc.). You will need to record your off-the-job hours regularly, at least once per month. You may find it useful to read the 'Day in the Life of a SBPA' which provides examples of activities that count towards the OTJ commitment.

You may find it useful to read the “Day in the Life of a CMDAS Apprenticeship” which provides examples of activities that count towards the OTJ commitment. Useful guidance has also been issued by the DfE on what does and what does not constitute OTJ training ([Apprenticeships: off-the-job training - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apprenticeships-off-the-job-training))

How will I be assessed?

You will be required to complete a formal assignment(s) at the end of each module to enable you to complete the degree. You will also be required to develop a **portfolio of evidence** as part of the apprenticeship. There is a final end-point assessment which will be conducted by an external assessor once you have completed all elements of the CMDA for Schools. This will take place within 8 – 12 weeks of the successful completion of your studies. It will be done online and will comprise a presentation based on your work-based project followed by questions; a competency-based interview and a professional discussion.

Can I apply to study the CMDA for Schools if I work outside England?

Levy funding is only available to apprentices who live or work in England.

What qualification will I achieve?

Upon completing the apprenticeship, you will gain a BA (Hons) in School Business Management from the University of Gloucestershire. If you have been in a management role for three years or longer you will also be eligible to gain Chartered Manager status. If you have not been in a management role for three years you will be eligible for Chartered Manager status as soon as you have completed three years as a manager and for Foundation Chartered Manager status in the interim.

How do I apply?

You should first discuss with your line manager whether this apprenticeship is appropriate for you based on your role and its demands, the support they can provide and the amount of time you can dedicate to study. Please go to our website to start the application process: [Level 6 Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship for Schools \(CMDA\) - Employment, Skills and Training from Serco](https://www.serco.co.uk/level-6-chartered-manager-degree-apprenticeship-for-schools-cmda-employment-skills-and-training)

What is the role of my line manager?

We will only accept applications from individuals who have the support of their line manager. Your line manager will be asked to sign registration documents to confirm their commitment and support your programme and to confirm their agreement to take part in the review process. Your line manager may wish to identify a mentor to support you throughout your programme of study rather than undertake this themselves.

Your line manager, or the mentor identified by your line manager, will be required to:

- Join the first meeting between you and your coach to ensure that all key parties are aware of the requirements of your training plan
- Actively contribute to all the progress reviews held with yourself (they will not be required to attend the full sessions)

- Observe you undertaking certain activities such as giving a presentation and complete a proforma confirmation observation of certain skills and behaviours, which will be included in your portfolio
- Attend and contribute to an annual review progress with you and your coach
- Ensure that you are given time to attend the progress reviews and all face-to-face workshops. This must NOT be deducted from your annual leave allowance. Please note that the workshops, web conferences, progress reviews and assessment sessions are mandatory elements of the apprenticeship that provide essential information and support for you to successfully complete the programme
- Support you in your studies, identifying opportunities for you to develop your skills alongside your learning
- Allow you a minimum of 20% of your working hours / 6 hours per week to complete off-the-job training activities.

What if I leave my employer after I have started the apprenticeship?

Providing you are continuing to work in a suitable role, your new employer may agree to your continuation and fund the remaining costs from their levy.

What if I must suspend studying due to ill-health or other circumstances beyond my control?

You may be able to go on a Break in Learning (BiL) for up to a year, depending upon circumstances.

What if I become pregnant once I have started the programme?

You will be able to defer (known as a Break in Learning) from the programme for up to a year.

How will the training be delivered?

Predominantly online but with a two-day face-to-face workshop at the start of all blocks of modules (there are 3 workshops per year, each workshop covering a block of 2 modules). A tutor and coach will help guide your learning. You will have a progress review with your coach every 10 to 12 weeks, plus additional phone contact if required. Your coach will discuss your progress and can advise on your portfolio. Please note that, whilst your learning will be guided, with support from your tutor (at the workshops and online) and your coach, you will be expected to work through the learning materials via our online learning platform.

Each module you study will have a start and end date and you may have one or two milestones during the unit, but aside from these it will be up to you to determine the pace at which you study and the amount of additional reading you do. This may be a different style of learning to your previous experience and it relies on your own motivation to succeed. You will also upload the evidence you gather to an online portfolio, which shows your progress through the apprenticeship.

Where will the training be delivered?

The main workshop location is likely to be our Serco office in Solihull (Birmingham). Progress reviews with your coach will predominantly be remote via MS Teams. However, where necessary, this may also take place at your place of work.

Do I have to attend every training event and assessment?

Yes, 100% attendance is mandatory. It is your responsibility to make arrangements to ensure you have a 100% attendance record.

Will I be given time off work in order to study? (20% off-the-job requirement)

The programme will contain a minimum of 20% off-the-job training. This will include shadowing, reading industry articles/research, attending workshops, completing a project and preparing/building your portfolio, etc.

What if I work part-time?

You are still eligible to join the programme; however, if you work fewer than 30 hours per week then the length of time in which you study will be extended, pro rata, to reflect your normal working hours.

Further information: [Level 6 Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship for Schools \(CMDA\) - Employment, Skills and Training from Serco](#)

Enquiries: learnerrecruitment@serco.com

Please note that apprenticeship funding is managed by the Department for Education (DfE), the Government agency accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults. As an apprenticeship training provider our activities must adhere to DfE guidance and requirements. Many of the required onboarding documents and forms are necessary to meet DfE requirements.