

TCAT



Cluster Finance Manager

The Challenge Academy Trust
Candidate Information Pack

SERVE CHALLENGE EMPOWER

Welcome

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for the interest you have shown in the position of Finance Manager with The Challenge Academy Trust (TCAT).

TCAT was formed in 2017 by like-minded leaders of local primary and secondary schools in Warrington along with Priestley College. Our vision is rooted in our mission – to serve, challenge, and empower the educational community. We embody this mission by offering highly effective services to our academies, fostering strong leadership, investing in our workforce, and inspiring the children and young people in our care.

These guiding principles are anchored in our core values, which encompass:

- Inclusivity and social justice
- Educational excellence
- Collaboration and interdependence
- Challenge and service
- Care and sustainability
- Celebrating difference

These values underpin everything we do as a trust, shaping our services and working practices. We operate around three core principles:

- **Continuous professional development:** An extensive range of training for teacher and support staff at all levels of the organisation. We invest in our staff to ensure they feel valued, develop as practitioners and provide the best outcomes for our young people.
- **Collaboration:** We aim to create strength through interdependence and collective accountability in our working practices via our extensive professional hub network.
- **Challenge & support in equal measure:** A programme of quality assurance provides our academies with a 'mirror on themselves' with the expertise and experience to support improvement where necessary.

Our mission is to serve, challenge and empower the educational community. We enact our mission by adopting an operational excellence framework in what we do, providing highly effective services to our academies, supporting strong leadership, investing in the workforce, and inspiring our children and young people.

There are currently 14 member academies based in Warrington and the surrounding area, including six primary academies, seven secondary academies and a sixth form college, all rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. We also operate a subsidiary outdoor education company operating on Anglesey.

We have around 11,000 children and young people in our care along with over 1,300 staff and revenue of c. £100 million. These may seem like huge numbers; however, we pride ourselves on maintaining an intimacy within this which is built upon positive and professional relationships.

Recognised by the Department for Education as a 'strong' trust, we are proud of the current financial and educational health of the trust. Ours is a trust that is financially secure and fully compliant, with a record of clean audits, positive ESFA reviews and a healthy surplus linked to a strong investment strategy. Our latest annual report, including our financial statements, can be found here: [Annual Report TCAT 2024](#) / [TCAT Annual Impact Report](#) and you can learn more about us here: [About Us – The Challenge Academy Trust](#)

We are not an organisation prone to resting on its laurels; this trust is growing in size, complexity and in influence and this is an exciting time to join our Trust. I would encourage candidates to get in touch for a conversation about the role and we look forward to receiving your application.

Yours faithfully,

David Halsall
Chief Finance Officer

About the Role

FINANCE MANAGER

Salary:	TCAT Grade 7 – NJC scp 23 (£34,434) to NJC scp 27 (£38,220) *pay award pending
Hours:	37 hours per week, permanent
Reporting to:	Management Accountant
Work Location:	TCAT Professional Development Centre, Bridgewater High School (Upper), Broomfields Road, Warrington, WA4 3AE

The Challenge Academy Trust (TCAT) is a multi-academy trust made of up 6 primary schools, 7 secondary schools and a 16-19 sixth form college, with over 11,000 students, 1,300 employees and revenue of c/ £100 million. We are a forward thinking, vibrant and rapidly growing trust and our people are key to our continued growth and success. This is an exciting time to join our trust!

Our team of Finance Managers play a vital role in supporting our academies through the effective and efficient management of financial resources and the production of timely, accurate monthly management reports. You will manage the operational finance processes of a small group of our academies, supporting the work of academy-based colleagues. Reporting to the Trust Management Accountant & Chief Finance Officer, you will also work closely with academy Heads/Principals in relation to academy finance matters.

How to apply

To apply, visit our website: [Management Accountant – The Challenge Academy Trust](#)

Closing Date – 12 noon, 1 July 2026

Applications received after the closing time will not be considered.

Working for The Challenge Academy Trust

At The Challenge Academy Trust, we want to embed a culture that champions better work and working lives across the Trust; a framework to support and develop our workforce from 'hire to retire'. Our staff workload, wellbeing and benefits package demonstrates our commitment to ensure we can:

- Provide a workload that is fair and reasonable,
- Foster an environment where employee health and wellbeing are actively supported and promoted,
- Develop employee's personal and professional skills & knowledge continuously throughout their careers,
- Provide structured routes for career progression,
- Reward people fairly with transparent and appropriate pay and conditions of service alongside additional benefits through TCAT+:
 - Retailer discounts and savings,
 - Car Lease scheme,
 - Cycle to Work scheme,
 - Discounted Healthcare Cash Plan with Westfield Health,

TCAT+ also hosts a range of online wellbeing resources, supporting physical, emotional, financial, professional and social wellbeing.



Continuing Professional Development
Join us at Education Connect to access high-quality CPD that is rooted in the latest research, promotes innovation, and fosters a culture of collaboration.



Cycle to Work Scheme
Save 23-39% on a new bike for work. TCAT have teamed up with BHN Extras to offer a Cycle to work salary sacrifice scheme.



TCAT Plus (Health and Wellbeing and Staff Discounts)
TCAT Plus is an online hub for all staff that offers wellbeing support and financial discounts at hundreds of big brand online and high street retailers.



Smart Tech
A chance to get the latest tech at the best price and spread the payments over your salary, interest-free.



Car Benefit Scheme
A salary sacrifice car lease scheme in partnership with Tusker. Access an electric or hybrid vehicle that will be fully serviced, insured, vehicle tax paid and recovery assistance.



Hub Support Model
Strength through interdependence and collective accountability in our working practices. Much of this is achieved via our extensive professional hub network.



Pension
A career within TCAT will provide you with access to the Teachers Pension or Local Government Pension scheme.



Enhanced annual leave for support staff
8 bank holidays plus up to 31 days annual leave.



Entitlement to occupational sick pay
Up to six months full pay and six months half pay in the event of being unable to work.



Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental leave
Enhanced maternity and adoption pay for eligible employees.



Workload Strategy
We have carefully examined and implemented the recommendations outlined in the DfE Workload Reduction Toolkit across the Trust. We are committed to aligning and integrating our approach to workload management for all our staff.

JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Title:	Finance Manager
Reporting to:	Management Accountant
Working Relationships:	The finance function is organised into 5 clusters organised on sector/geographical principles, each with a dedicated Finance Manager. Finance Managers work for a part of each week in the academies within their cluster, directing and monitoring the work of academy-based finance staff, updating academy Heads/Principals in relation to academy operational matters

Main Purpose

Finance Managers are responsible for the financial operational management of a cluster of academies, ensuring that accurate financial records are maintained and that all elements of financial operations in the hubs are carried out in accordance with the Trust Financial Regulations. The post holder will be expected to work within established procedures and guidelines and to prioritise day-to-day work.

Primary Duties and Responsibilities

- Provide the Academy Principals and the Trust Management Accountant with monthly reports on the up-to-date financial position.
- Work with the Academy Principals, the Trust Management Accountant and the budget holders to forecast expenditure accurately enabling management decisions to be made based on accurate and timely information.
- Support the Management Accountant in the annual preparation of the academy budget and any budget re-forecasts carried out throughout the year
- Functional responsibility for the operation of the academy's accounts including budget monitoring
- Ensure that all work is completed to agreed deadlines so that all statutory reports to the DfE, Companies House, Teachers' Pension Scheme, Cheshire Pension Scheme and HMRC are carried out accurately and to published schedules for delivery at the appropriate times.
- Monitor the implementation of funds under the various budgets to ensure that the whole academy budget is administered according to the Principal's and the Trust's decisions.
- Provide financial information and advice to academy budget holders to ensure budgets are adhered to.
- Supervise the collection, banking and disbursement of all official monies (including academy lettings income) within the academies to ensure they are accounted for in accordance with Financial Regulations.
- Responsible for ensuring that academy staff are paid accurately in accordance with schedules by administering payroll by
 - Overseeing the preparation of information required by the academy's payroll provider,
 - Investigating and reconciling payroll reports prior to payment,
 - Ensuring the resolution of payroll queries.

- Responsible for monitoring and maintaining the academy's cash flow position, ensuring a positive cash position, and administering payment runs.
- Supervise the processing of all financial documentation including the inputting of orders and processing of invoices and cheques to ensure prompt and accurate payments are made.
- Responsible for the implementation of the academy's financial policies and procedures in accordance with the Trust Financial Regulations.
- Responsible for supervising the work of the Finance Assistants, allocating their tasks and monitoring the quality of their work ensuring accuracy and timeliness of work in the department.
- Responsible for the performance management reviews of the Academy Finance Staff including identifying training and development requirements and ensuring that development needs are met.

Professional Development

- Engage in own continuous professional development.
- Attend briefings and participate in professional development opportunities.
- Keep up-to-date with educational developments and legislation affecting trust finances.

Other Duties

- Participate in training and other learning activities as required.
- Participate in the Trust Performance Management Process.
- To undertake and other duties and responsibilities as required that are covered by the scope of the post.
- To undertake any other reasonable duties at the request of the Chief Finance Officer / Management Accountant
- Promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people.
- Ensure compliance with health and safety, data protection, and equality policies

REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS: The details contained in this Job Description reflect the content of the job at the date it was prepared. However, it is inevitable that over time the nature of the job may change. Existing duties may no longer be required, and other duties may be gained without changing the general nature of the post or the level of responsibility entailed. Consequently, the Trust will expect to revise this Job Description from time to time and will consult with the post-holder at the appropriate time.

REVIEW DATE: June 2026

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Criteria		Essential	Desirable	Assessment Method
Qualifications				
1	Formal accountancy qualification (ACA, ACCA, CIPFA, CIMA, AAT) or qualified through experience.	X		A/I
2	5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths	X		A/I
3	Minimum of 2 Level 3 qualifications (A Level or equivalent)		X	A/I
4	Educated to degree level or equivalent.		X	A/I
5	Commitment to, and evidence of, ongoing professional development.	X		A/I
Experience & Knowledge				
6	Previous experience in managing the work of a finance office and a small team of people.	X		A/I
7	Experience in the operation of accounting processes, sales order and invoice processing, month and year end closure procedures.	X		A/I
8	Experience in the management and operation of academy accounting procedures.	X		A/I
9	Experience of managing a budget control system and reporting upon budget management and variance,	X		A/I
10	Advanced and developed understanding of accounting procedures and processes including order and invoices processing, preparation of monthly accounting processes including bank reconciliation.	X		A/I/T
11	Detailed understanding of month and year-end closure processes in accordance with accrual accounting principles.	X		A/I
12	High level of computer literacy including in-depth knowledge of MS office – Outlook/ Word/ Excel - and of computer academy accounting systems.	X		A/I/T
13	Experience of working in an education finance environment.		X	A/I
14	Experience of the Civica finance package.		X	A/I

Skills & Competencies				
15	Excellent communication and interpersonal skills, with the ability to build effective relationships with a wide range of stakeholders.	X		A/I
16	Ability to analyse varied information from a number of sources and resolving problems without direct reference to a manager.	X		A/I/T
17	Ability to explain complex financial concepts to non-specialists.	X		A/I/T
18	Exercise training and motivational skills in relation to team members.	X		A/I
19	Liaise with academy employees, academy leadership team and external agencies.	X		A/I
20	Ability to prioritise own workload, responding to unanticipated situations, in order to work to tight deadlines.	X		A/I/T
21	Able to handle considerable levels of interruptions, conflicting demands and changing priorities.	X		A/I
22	Strong administrative skills and excellent attention to detail.	X		A/I/T
Behaviours & Attributes				
23	Flexible and enthusiastic approach to work.	X		A/I
24	Resilient and able to thrive under pressure	X		A/I/T
25	Commitment to the trust's values and the promotion of diversity, equality, and inclusion.	X		A/I
Other requirements				
26	Enhanced DBS clearance.	X		A/I
27	Compliance with all academy and trust policies.	X		A/I
28	Commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people.	X		A/I
29	Ability to travel between academies and attend evening meetings as required.	X		A/I
30	Understanding of and commitment to the principles and practice of equality, diversity and inclusion.	X		A/I

Key: A = Application; I = Interview; T = Task

NOTE TO APPLICANTS:

Whilst all points on the specification are important, those marked as 'essential' are the key requirements for the role. You should pay particular attention to these points and provide evidence of meeting them. Failure to do so may mean that you will not be invited for interview.

REVIEW DATE: October 2025