



# A MAT Leaders Guide to Better Buying

Software, solutions and services for education

# With education budgets tighter than ever, MAT leaders are finding new ways to make every pound count, helping to drive value-focused procurement decisions that benefit their schools and students.

**Good procurement isn't just about cutting costs; it's also about improving efficiency and finding solutions that have the greatest impact on teaching and learning. Equally important is keeping things simple and avoiding unnecessary complexity or paying for features that won't be used.**

Finding suppliers who meet the diverse needs of MATs and solve real educational challenges is no small task, but it's key to success. So, where do you begin?

This guide, created by our team of MAT experts and education procurement consultants, offers practical tips to help MAT leaders like you simplify procurement and make informed, cost-effective decisions that support both your MAT and the schools within it.



# Why smarter buying matters

**Making smart purchasing decisions helps ensure resources are used effectively, cutting down on waste and improving how education is delivered.**

Thoughtful buying can:

- Help you get the most value from your budget.
- Lighten the administrative load on your schools.
- Make sure your systems work well now and can grow with the future needs of your MAT.
- Boost teacher efficiency, giving them more time to focus on teaching and supporting students.
- Help you get the systems you need without being bogged down by features that won't benefit your MAT.

On the other hand, poor purchasing decisions (like choosing complex, non-specialist, "all-in-one" solutions) can waste resources and create more problems than they solve. To successfully integrate systems, it's crucial to involve users in the decision-making process from the start alongside senior leadership. This collaborative approach helps ensure that staff not only adopt the systems but use them effectively, maximising their impact.



# Best practices for centralised buying

**To achieve procurement success, you should consider centralising purchasing decisions wherever possible.**

This approach allows for bulk purchasing discounts, consistency across schools, and simplified support and training. However, centralisation must be balanced with flexibility to meet your individual school's needs. Here are some top tips and best practices you might want to consider:

- 1. Define needs clearly:** Before seeking out solutions, identify the specific challenges and objectives for your MAT.
- 2. Do thorough research:** Understand the market and evaluate all options carefully. Peer recommendations are valuable, but consider your Trust's unique context.
- 3. Align purchases with strategic goals:** Ensure each solution not only addresses immediate needs but also supports your broader educational and operational priorities for sustained impact and growth.
- 4. Streamline systems:** Don't fall into the "all-in-one" trap. Avoid purchasing systems with unnecessary features that may only complicate processes without delivering real value.



## Find the right fit for your MAT

**MATs are complex and diverse, with each school having its own unique staffing, budgets, student demographics, and operational priorities. What works well for one of your schools may not be the best fit for another. To ensure the best decision-making, conducting a comprehensive evaluation is essential.**

Poor planning has often been the downfall of many purchasing projects, leading to wasted money and frustration among staff. Avoid the temptation to rush into a purchase based solely on reputation or recommendation. Instead, take a step back and assess the real impact a solution will have on your specific context.



# Key questions to guide your buying decisions

## 1 Does this solution align with our strategic goals and priorities?

**Why it matters:** Ensure the product or service supports the MAT's long-term vision and educational objectives.

## 2 What is the total cost of ownership?

**Why it matters:** Clarify all costs, including initial fees, ongoing maintenance, support, and any hidden charges.

## 3 Can the solution scale as our MAT grows?

**Why it matters:** Ensure the solution can accommodate future expansion without requiring significant additional investment.

## 4 How does onboarding work, and what is the implementation timeline?

**Why it matters:** It's important to understand the implementation process, how long it will take, and what resources are needed. Involving key stakeholders from the start also helps make sure everyone is on the same page, leading to smoother adoption and greater success.

## 5 Do the systems integrate with our existing tools?

**Why it matters:** Ensure the solution integrates smoothly with your current systems to avoid disruptions and data silos.

## 6 What training and ongoing support are provided?

**Why it matters:** Confirm the level of training and support available to ensure smooth adoption and effective use.

## 7 What does the product roadmap look like, and how will the solution evolve?

**Why it matters:** Ensure the solution will remain relevant and adaptable to future educational trends and needs.

## 8 How does this solution improve teaching and learning outcomes?

**Why it matters:** Ensure the solution has a measurable positive impact on student outcomes and teacher effectiveness.

## 9 How is data security managed, and does the solution comply with regulations?

**Why it matters:** Verify that the solution meets data protection and privacy standards, including GDPR, DfE, Ofsted and safeguarding requirements.

## 10 How will return on investment (ROI) be measured?

**Why it matters:** Understand the metrics used to evaluate ROI and ensure the solution delivers tangible benefits.

## 11 Are there any case studies or references from other MATs?

**Why it matters:** Look for evidence of success with other MATs or similar educational organisations.

## 12 Are the contract terms flexible?

**Why it matters:** Ensure the contract offers flexibility for future adjustments or changes in scope.

## 13 How customisable is the solution to our specific needs?

**Why it matters:** Confirm whether the solution can be tailored to suit the unique needs of different schools within the MAT.

## 14 How user-friendly is the solution for teachers and students?

**Why it matters:** A simple, intuitive interface will ensure quicker adoption and effective use across the MAT.

## 15 How does the solution support collaboration across the MAT?

**Why it matters:** The solution should facilitate communication, resource sharing, and consistency between schools.

## 16 What level of human support and account management is offered?

**Why it matters:** Ensure ongoing support is available to help with adoption and address any challenges.

## 17 Will the supplier consistently provide school-level support and MAT-level support to help with change management?

**Why it matters:** Ensure the provider offers support at both the school and MAT levels to facilitate smooth change management and adoption at all levels of the organisation.

## 18 What frameworks is the provider on for the respective system?

**Why it matters:** Confirm whether the provider is accredited or listed on relevant educational frameworks (e.g., G-Cloud, Digital Marketplace) to ensure reliability, compliance, and accessibility.

## 19 What is the vendor's reputation in the education sector?

**Why it matters:** Check the vendor's experience and track record in supporting MATs and schools.

## 20 Can this solution reduce technical debt across the Trust?

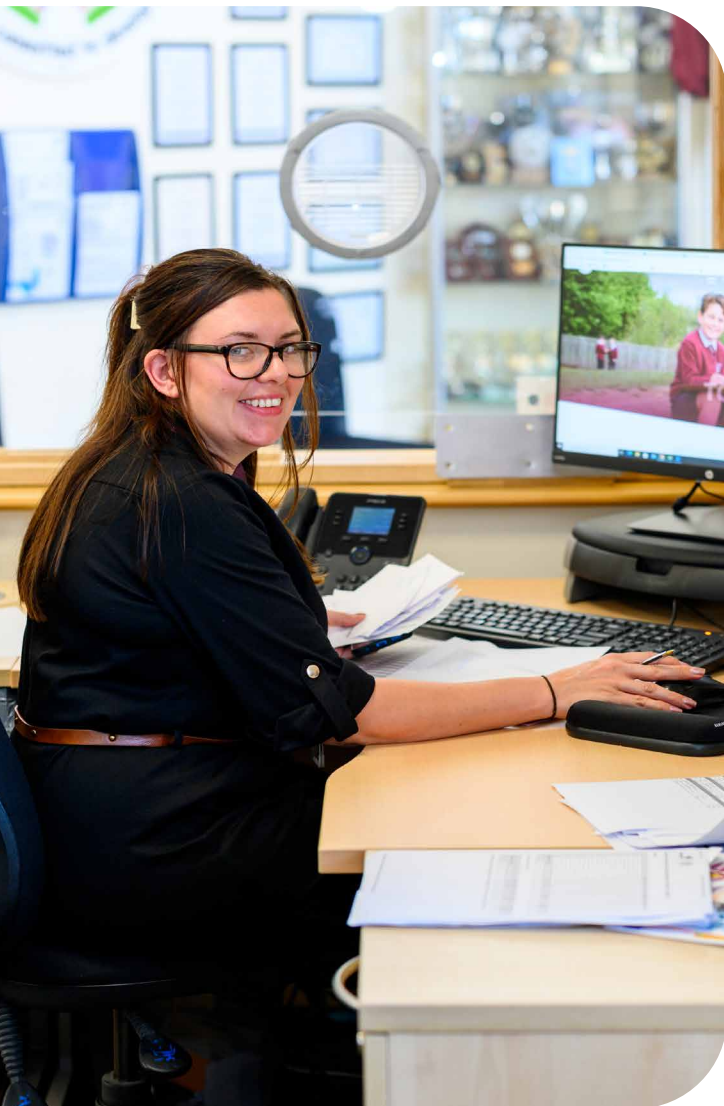
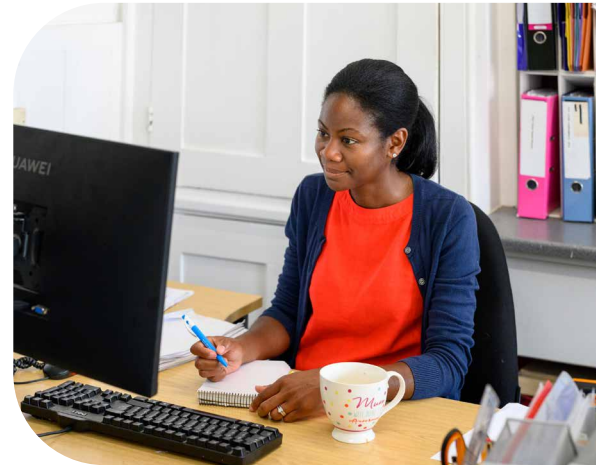
**Why it matters:** Assess whether the solution can streamline operations, reduce reliance on outdated systems, and simplify IT management.



# The value of frameworks for MAT procurement

**Frameworks give MAT leaders a simple way to connect with trusted, pre-vetted suppliers.**

They make the procurement process easier by highlighting the key systems and services needed while helping schools avoid unnecessary systems and features. This focused approach saves time, ensures compliance, and lets Trusts focus on solutions that truly meet their needs.



## What frameworks are Juniper a part of?

Juniper Education is proud to be part of the following key education procurement frameworks, which help MATs make smarter buying decisions.

- [EICT \(Education ICT Framework\)](#)
- [Procurement Services](#)
- [G-Cloud 14 Framework](#)  
for Payroll, MIS, Websites, Sistra Analytics and Sonar Tracker
- [ECS/Valuematch](#)
- [National Framework for Academy Services](#)  
(for HR, Payroll, and Internal Scrutiny)
- [CPC \(Crescent Purchasing Consortium\)](#)  
for Internal Scrutiny

By being part of these frameworks, Juniper Education makes sure Trusts get access to best-in-breed services while making the procurement process easy and straightforward, whilst fully supporting compliance with the [Academies Trust Handbook](#) guidelines.

You can also use the GOV.UK website to [find additional frameworks](#) for your MAT.

# Get a better buying experience with the JoinUp ecosystem

To help MATs and schools simplify product and solution selection, Juniper Education has launched JoinUp – an ecosystem of best-in-class tools designed to address real educational challenges.

With seamless integration, everything works together, providing the flexibility to adapt to your school's unique needs. Juniper isn't an "all-in-one" platform; it's an ecosystem of specialist tools and services working in harmony, tailored to your school's operations.

Rather than a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach, JoinUp offers adaptable solutions that work together seamlessly across your MAT, helping address real challenges and drive meaningful change.

## Why choose JoinUp?

Juniper's JoinUp approach offers schools and MATs the freedom to customise and connect, without compromise.

- **Tailored solutions:** Tools such as Sonar Tracker, Sisra Analytics, and Timetabling can be customised to fit your MAT's specific requirements.
- **Data continuity:** Integrated systems ensure data flows seamlessly, improving decision-making and saving time.
- **Improved parent engagement:** Modern communication tools strengthen relationships with parents.
- **Flexibility:** The JoinUp ecosystem evolves with your school's needs, helping you stay responsive to new challenges.

Keep the tools you love, integrate the ones you need, and build a system that works for you.



# JoinUp with Juniper

Beyond providing products and services via **JoinUp**, Juniper Education offers consultancy and advisory support to streamline your buying processes.

Our MAT specialists are here to help you make the best decisions for your schools.

**Get in touch** to discover how we can help your Trust deliver smarter procurement strategies and achieve better outcomes.





# Want to talk to a MAT expert?

**Call us:**

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