

Annex 6: Cost standard benchmark

Cost Standard benchmarks for school or college projects under Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme.

1. Benchmark

Standardised cost benchmarks need to be applied to as many of the elements of the build as possible. This will result in a maximum value for a school that can be benchmarked to provide a maximum funding envelope. Contingency/inflation/risk allowances should be reduced through the business case and tender process.

2. Cost

The Welsh Government continues to monitor cost fluctuations in the construction sector and on the Programme on a regular basis taking account of relevant cost indices. Benchmarks are subject to change to take account of these changes.

The construction cost has been normalized to current project costs at Q4 2025 and predicted for future years by applying BCIS Tender Price Indices.

Net Zero Carbon allowance, Furniture Fixings and Equipment cost, and ICT cost have also been adjusted in line with BCIS Tender Price Indices.

In practice, where a project exceeds this value, the Welsh Government grant could be capped at the threshold indicated (abnormal costs would be considered separately, see point 7).

3. Refurbishment Rates

Below is a description of the different types of refurbishments applicable to the rates included in the table at point 6.

Light Refurbishment - Investment focused on common areas and essential repairs only. Extension of economic life is approximately five years. Works include strip out of existing space, shell and core refurbishment including cosmetic upgrades. Assumes existing main plant, existing floors and ceilings are retained.

Medium Refurbishment - Investment involves full upgrade of the existing building services and finishes but stops short of major structural alterations. Extension of economic life is approximately 15 years. Works include strip out of existing space, shell and core refurbishment including cosmetic upgrades. No major structural or sub-structural alterations. Existing floors and ceilings are retained and minor repairs only to façade.

Heavy Refurbishment - Investment includes significant structural alterations and may also include the replacement of facades and roof finishes. The complete renewal of internal fittings, finishes, and Mechanical and Electrical systems. The building is typically unoccupied. Extension of economic life is approximately 15 - 30 years. Works include strip out of existing space, shell and core refurbishment including cosmetic upgrades. Replacement to raised floors, ceilings and new services.

4. Furniture, Fittings and Equipment / Information Technology

Furniture, fittings and equipment typically include the following:

- Tables and chairs,
- Science lab fit out,
- Domestic science fit out,
- School kitchens / canteens.

It excludes portable equipment such as Bunsen burners, test tubes, saucepans etc. IT Equipment is expected to include fitting out the school beyond the sockets and could include some basic classroom equipment, such as an interactive white board.

5. Net Zero Carbon

100% intervention can be applied up to the benchmark allowance for increased costs over and above BREEAM Excellent to achieve Net Zero in Operation and the relevant embodied carbon target for the period, based on target start date.

Years	Embodied Carbon Target
2025 - 2029	Below 600 kgCO ₂ /m ²
2030 - 2035	Below 350 kgCO ₂ /m ²
2035 - onwards	To be confirmed

6. Benchmark Cost Table

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Primary	£ 5,816	£ 5,991	£ 6,171	£ 6,356	£ 6,546	£ 6,743
Secondary¹	£ 5,216	£ 5,373	£ 5,534	£ 5,700	£ 5,871	£ 6,047
Special²	£ 6,103	£ 6,286	£ 6,475	£ 6,669	£ 6,869	£ 7,075
Net Zero Carbon	£ 429	£ 442	£ 455	£ 469	£ 483	£ 497
Fit out cost per pupil/student						
IT	£ 678	£ 698	£ 719	£ 741	£ 763	£ 786
FF&E	£ 1,490	£ 1,535	£ 1,581	£ 1,628	£ 1,677	£ 1,727
Total	£ 2,167	£ 2,232	£ 2,299	£ 2,368	£ 2,439	£ 2,512
Refurbishment Costs per m2						
Light	£ 2,256	£ 2,324	£ 2,394	£ 2,465	£ 2,539	£ 2,616
Medium	£ 3,541	£ 3,647	£ 3,757	£ 3,870	£ 3,986	£ 4,105
Heavy	£ 4,575	£ 4,712	£ 4,853	£ 4,999	£ 5,149	£ 5,303

7. Abnormal Costs

The standard benchmark represents the full cost of building a new facility on a flat, green field site with no demolition of an old building, no ground condition issues arising from the site's topography or contamination, with a standard approach to foundations. If the site is other than green field and flat, we appreciate that there may be other abnormal costs which can attract Welsh Government funding.

Abnormals will include:

- Cut and fill to site
- Extra over for foundations other than strip foundation
- Retaining walls
- Swales, ponds and basins designed as Sustainable Drainage Systems
- Extra over for green roofs
- Asbestos Removal
- Demolition
- Land decontamination
- Substation (Within red line boundary)
- Temporary accommodation and decant

(any costs considered by delivery partner to be abnormal over and above this list will need to be justified and agreed beforehand and before they are presented for scrutiny)

¹ Secondary rates to include All through Schools and FE Colleges

² Special School rate applies to Special Schools and is not intended for ALN provision within a mainstream project or an SRB

Abonormals DO NOT include

- Surface water drainage
- Car parking
- Site strip
- Site access
- Embodied Carbon reduction or NZC in operation strategies or technologies
- Architectural features
- Service connection
- Fees
- Site investigations, asbestos surveys
- MUGA

8. Land and Buildings

Land or Building Acquisition will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and the Welsh Government would look for evidence that a site selected is an appropriate option. Where land or building purchase costs are approved through our governance structure, these can be met by Welsh Government according to the relevant project intervention rate.