



Public Accounts Committee

Susan Acland-Hood
Permanent Secretary
Department for Education

By email

9 January 2025

Academy accounts and performance Report 2019

Dear Permanent Secretary,

Following changes to the policy for publishing investigations into the financial practices of academies I am concerned that the changes hinder transparency and do not align with the view of the Committee expressed in its 2019 report (recommendation 5).

In January 2019, the Committee recommended that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) publish, within two months, the results of its inquiries into concerns about the financial management and governance of academy trusts. The Government accepted this recommendation and committed to transparency through reporting its "financial management and governance concerns and publishing outcomes of its investigations on gov.uk". It aimed to publish within two months of completing its work, subject to ongoing police or regulatory activity.

The subsequent gov.uk guidance used slightly different wording to that in the Committee's recommendation. It described "releasing investigation reports within two months of completing work." However, after a review, the current guidance now describes ESFA committing to "publish investigation outcomes".

To ensure that the Department for Education is sufficiently balancing transparency against other factors such as timeliness I request that you write to the Committee to:

- set out how you considered transparency against other factors, such as timeliness, when changing your guidance to ensure evidence-based decision;
- describe how you will ensure sufficient information is available to the sector to understand gaps in practice and learn lessons with just investigation outcomes published;
- justify why the Department only published outcomes for its recent publication, despite new guidance being effective for those investigations starting after 12 December 2023; and
- reconfirm your commitment to publish results within two months of completion in line with your initial commitment to the Committee, particularly should these be shortened.



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The further information requested above will allow my Committee to consider whether publication of investigation outcomes, rather than reports, on a timely basis sufficiently complies with the substance of the Committee's 2019 recommendation.

I would be grateful for a response by 23 January.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Geoffrey Clifton-Brown'.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts