



Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Robert Halfon MP, Chair

Susan Acland-Hood
Permanent Secretary
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
London
SW1P 3BT

5 March 2021

Dear Permanent Secretary,

Many thanks to your officials for attending the Committee on 23 February to discuss the financial management of schools, and for the subsequent letter dated 1 March which provided additional information on some of the issues raised. The Committee found the session extremely valuable.

I am writing to follow-up further on one area that arose during the session, specifically the Department's use of external providers to conduct consultancy, research and surveys on behalf of the Department.

During the session on 23rd, we were told that the Department has contracted Ipsos MORI and Renaissance Learning to conduct separate polling and research projects as part of its efforts to collect evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on education, at a cost of £190,000 and £143,201 respectively.

While we accept that it may be necessary for departments to require and undertake research in order to deepen their understanding of issues, measure educational outcomes and to better inform and target policy, we would like evidence that commissioning external bodies for such purposes provides good value for money for the tax-payer.

To that end, we would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with the following:

1. A list of all the consultants and external organisations (to include individual consultants, private sector bodies, universities, research institutions and think tanks) which the Department has employed, directly or indirectly, for such purposes in the last five years, along with a brief description of the work undertaken, and the full costings of the contract awarded.
2. We are also concerned that some of these external organisations may be awarded contracts and are then sub-contracting much of this work to others. This could imply that an extra margin is incurred and that accountability for the work that is undertaken is diluted. Could you therefore also provide details of any current sub-contracting of work and projects that are commissioned by the Department from external providers in the areas of consultancy and research services (to include individual consultants, private sector bodies, universities, research institutions and think tanks)? Does DfE impose conditions under its consultancy and

research contract limiting the scope or scale of subcontracting without prior consent? Please also provide full details of the Department's procurement policy.

3. Finally, we would like to know what assessment the Department undertakes following the delivery and completion of these contracts, of the performance and work produced by these providers. Please also confirm who in the Department is responsible for this quality assurance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and the Secretary of State for Education.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Robert Halfon', with a stylized, cursive script.

Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Committee