



Permanent Secretary

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RT Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Mr Halfon,

I am writing to you following your letter of 5th March in which you requested information regarding the Department's use of external providers to conduct consultancy, research and surveys on behalf of the Department. You referenced the contract with IPSOS Mori and Renaissance Learning for social research to understand impact of Covid 19 on education.

It is vital that the Department's policies are underpinned by robust evidence and subjected to rigorous evaluation to ensure programmes have the impact anticipated, are value for money and are efficiently delivered. HM Treasury and Cabinet Office have, under this spending review, applied enhanced conditions around robust impact evaluation. These factors, along with a need for independence, mean that the Department is often required to commission out key research and evaluation work.

In response to your specific requests:

1. The Department publishes key economic and social research information via [Contracts Finder](#), [Transparency Data Returns - DfE and executive agency spend over £25,000](#), within the annual [Office for National Statistics Research & Development Expenditure Reports](#), [DfE consolidated annual report and accounts](#), and [GOV.UK Research Publications](#).

In addition, following a review of the Department's research by Lord Agnew in December 2019, a series of improvement activities which will allow an even more comprehensive picture of activity are currently underway, including:

- Launching a formal DfE Research Transformation Programme.
- Merging spend into centrally overseen social and economic

research budget(s).

- Creation of a new research commercial category within the Department's Commercial Division, which transferred in January 2021.
2. The research tendering process welcomes consortia bids where different skills are offered from different organisations. These bids are evaluated to a clear and consistent set of criteria to ensure the contract is awarded to the strongest bid. The Department's standard Terms and Conditions have mandatory clauses restricting the use of sub-contractors without prior permission
 3. Prior to the commissioning of any research, the proposal, impact and value are scrutinised by the Department's Research Board, comprising senior analysts from across the Business. Currently, any research proposal for over £25,000 must also be approved by the Secretary of State.

Research contracts typically contain detailed milestones for delivery with payments aligning to successful completion of these milestones to the agreed standard. Quality assurance is measured throughout the life of the contract by the relevant project manager, typically a DfE professional analyst, using standards such as the [Quality Assurance Framework](#) to ensure the research is fit for purpose, reliable, accurate, transparent and accountable. Policy professionals are also involved throughout via a steering group. Final outputs of the research are then signed off by Deputy Directors before Spads and Ministers are sighted on the findings of any published research reports.

I hope you find this letter helpful, and that it provides the clarity and assurance you are seeking.



**SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD
PERMANENT SECRETARY**