



Department
for Education



Infrastructure
and Projects
Authority

To: Susan Dawson, Schools
Commercial Project

From: AO of dept Nick Smallwood,
Infrastructure and Projects Authority,
Cabinet Office

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Date: 1 July 2021

Dear Susan

Appointment as SRO for the Schools Commercial Programme

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for the Schools Commercial Programme with effect from 11 January 2021. It sets out your responsibilities, and the support you have the right to expect from the department and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

In this role, you are directly accountable to your Director General with oversight from the Permanent Secretary and the Secretary of State for Education.

Thank you for taking on this important role – you have my full support in executing your responsibilities and in drawing on the support and resources of the department as set out in this letter.

As the SRO, you are directly responsible for projects on the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) will now be held personally accountable to and could be called to attend Parliamentary Select Committees. You will be expected to account for and explain the decisions and actions you have taken to deliver the Schools Commercial Programme.

It is important to be clear that your accountability relates only to implementation: it will remain for the Minister to account for the relevant policy decisions and development.

You should familiarise yourself with guidance on “Giving Evidence to Select Committees – Guidance for Civil Servants” and with the Infrastructure & Projects Authority (IPA) guidance on management of major projects.

A signed copy of this letter will be published on the DfE website. This is a requirement of all projects that are part of the GMPP.

Summary of responsibilities

As SRO you have personal accountability for delivery of the Schools Commercial Programme. You are responsible for:

- delivering the programme vision
- delivery of agreed objectives and policy intent over the 12-month tenure of your appointment
- maintaining effective management for the programme to ensure work is appropriately defined, planned, monitored, and controlled, and quality managed to maximise success
- ensuring that a business case is appropriately updated throughout the project lifecycle
- presenting all iterations of the project's business case at Investment Committee (if it meets committee thresholds) to seek departmental approval
- identifying and securing the necessary approvals for the project internally and externally, for example HM Treasury (HMT) clearance and Cabinet Office (CO) controls
- managing the resources allocated to the programme and ensuring they are equipped with skills and expertise for successful delivery
- realising the benefits of the programme as outlined in the agreed business case
- ensuring effective governance is maintained for the programme
- understanding how risk is managed in the department (the risk management framework, which can be found on the [intranet](#), sets this out), setting up and embedding processes to identify and escalate risks and issues in your area, and actively managing risks where you are the owner
- influencing the context, culture, and operating environment of the programme to maximise its chances of success

Executing your SRO role

As SRO you are expected to remain in position until December 2021. You should make sure that you have appropriate knowledge management arrangements in place and could manage an orderly handover to a new SRO if required.

This will be a part-time role which requires approximately 70% of your time per month. This will be periodically reviewed to ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained across your range of activities.

Before signing this letter, you should have established in discussion with your Director General how managing your SRO responsibilities is going to be feasible alongside any other responsibilities. You will be expected to carry out this role alongside any other responsibilities and are responsible for making sure that you allocate sufficient time to the effective delivery of your SRO role and responsibilities.

It is vital to ensure appropriate succession planning is undertaken, however, it is confirmed that you are SRO for the programme in a limited timeframe until January/February 2022. Your appointment as SRO is with the purpose of maintaining programme delivery momentum and provision of consistent leadership during a period of maternity leave. It is, therefore, deemed that a formal succession plan is not required for the remaining period you are SRO. It is also not sensible nor feasible for you to undertake MPLA currently. However, if the situation changes in any respect this must be immediately reviewed, action taken for you or a new SRO to formalise a succession plan at the earliest convenience and to join an available MPLA cohort, if not already a graduate.

In the current circumstance, for the period you are SRO, it is required that you have regular management boards to ensure quorate decision making and to enable auditable delivery progress. It is also recommended that a contingency plan of a deputy with MPLA or PLP is nominated and available in two specific capacities. Firstly, to act as an advisor/point of contact for you and for the purpose of effectively managing a major project. Secondly, to be the point of contact and route of escalation for decision making should you be unavailable i.e., during periods of leave.

The contingency plan should be formalised in agreement with your Director General. It is your responsibility for your nominated deputy to be aware of their remit and capacity in this role and of the escalation route, should this need to be enacted.

If you find that you are not able to allocate sufficient time and attention to your role, you should escalate the issue to your Director General in the first instance, and in doing that you have the right to expect the issue to be resolved satisfactorily. If that is not possible, you should escalate, and have the right to require resolution of, the issue through the organisation's formal governance structures.

Support for you in your role

I am fully committed to making sure that DfE SROs, have access to the corporate services, support, and resources they need to execute their responsibilities. As SRO of a major project, I will invite you to a quarterly meeting with all the major project SROs where we can discuss common concerns and issues.

Your Director General is your senior sponsor for this project. In that role you can expect them to offer you support, advice and oversight on my behalf. This should include help with escalating unresolved risks and issues to the DfE Leadership Team where necessary, dealing with strategic blockers to delivery, and supporting you in obtaining the resources and support you need to execute your SRO responsibilities.

As part of the major projects' portfolio, you will have access to:

- support and expert advice from DfE's corporate functions including finance, commercial, transformation, digital, project delivery and analysis. Where the requirement is significant, you should request the nomination of a named, accountable individual who will provide the required services and support

- help to bring in essential external expert support and services if the organisation is not able to meet the need internally
- support from your Portfolio Lead in the Major Projects Directorate
- a growing network of delivery and programme specialists to act as contacts, mentors, or sources of assurance at critical stages of the project
- the [Project Delivery Capability Framework](#) which describes the job roles, capabilities and learning for all Government Project Delivery Professionals across government
- the right to be involved in decisions in the department that may affect your ability to deliver

Objectives and Performance Criteria

The long-term policy intent of this project is to support schools in achieving value for money in non-staff procurement, delivering a planned ROI of c.£619M by 2025.

The Programme is one of several programmes operating within the Department for Education, designed to support schools in achieving value for money. The Schools Commercial Strategy is designed to support schools to achieve value for money on their non-staff spend and change the behaviours of those in scope to become more proactive in reviewing their spend and methods in which they can reduce it. The programme aims to save schools £2,673.88m at a cost to the department of £157.9m (including VAT) over the next 10 yrs.

The focus of the Schools Commercial Programme initiatives are opportunities to save schools money in goods and services that they purchase, other than direct staff costs (this includes both capital and revenue spend). In addition to advice and support purely on buying, initiatives will include consideration of all aspects of the use and operation of non-staff resources within schools, including demand management, waste management, operational approaches for non-teaching elements of school activity, risk management, back-office functions, and ICT systems.

The organisations in scope for the Schools Commercial Strategy are:

- Public Schools in England.
- Special Educational Needs schools.
- Pupil Referral Units.
- Local Authorities in their capacity as operators of schools

In addition, and where appropriate to do so, initiatives delivered as part of the Programme may be made available to Higher and Further Education and Early Years organisations to support them in achieving value for money.

In the 2017 Schools Commercial Strategy delivered an ambitious strategy designed to support schools get best value for money from their non-staff spend. This Strategy realised a spend reduction of £0.8bn in non-staff expenditure between 2017–20.

The current, refreshed 2020 Strategy has built on the successes of the 2017 Strategy, developing 3 key strategic objectives as detailed below:

1. Buyers and other buying decisions makers in schools have access to the right support, relationships, information, and tools.
2. Schools and the buyers within them can make smart consumer choices.
3. Buyers have easy and timely access to best practice and best value every time.

These strategic objectives will be based on the following principles

1. Developing successful aspects of the current strategy using an agile commission-based approach, for example using data more effectively and focusing on user need to identify and prioritise new deals.
2. Stopping unsuccessful activity and grow successful activity, for example we know end to end services are more successful so building on the success of the RPA when considering our national approach to Hubs and to Energy Aggregation.
3. Being user driven and having an agile focus will allow us to create and test more radical evidence-based solutions such as the RPA. The principles of this evolutionary option would follow a holistic commissioning model putting more emphasis on a discovery phase for all initiatives not just digital ones.

This revised approach aims to deliver:

1. Tailored Support – Continue to promote the services offered by our 2 pilot hubs in the NW and SW, increasing uptake and maximising savings. Develop options and approach for rolling out national offer, maximising aggregation and undertaking complex procurements on behalf of schools.
2. End to end services – Expand the RPA to Local Authority Maintained Schools and develop schemes to reinvest surplus into risk reduction projects including flood resilience and crime prevention. Develop additional end to end services, starting with a National Energy Aggregation. Targeting our activity based on data and user research to increasing the range of types of intervention we offer- not just deals but highlighting best practice, benchmarking and alternative operating models that may generate savings.
3. Support – Continue to support the development of SBM networks and develop discussion/support materials on buying best practice. Engage financial decision makers in effective buying, e.g., Headteachers, Finance Directors and Governors.

To enable measurement of the success and impact derived from the objectives, principles, and approach three programme level benefits have been identified as part of the Schools Commercial Benefits Management Strategy. These strategic benefits are:

B1 - Schools get better value from their non-staff spend.

B2 - School Business Managers are supported to make better buying decisions through the Department's initiatives.

B3 - Buyers are satisfied with their access to specialist procurement support.

Schools Commercial Programme initiatives report to the Schools Commercial Programme Board (SCPB) and is held monthly and chaired by the SRO. The SCPB reports to:

1. Excellent Schools Resource Management Portfolio Board (ESRMPB)
2. Commercial Senior Leadership Team

ESRMPB and Commercial SLT meet monthly and are attended by the Schools Commercial SRO.

Proposed changes to the project scope which would affect the policy intent or benefits realisation must be authorised by your Director General.

The objectives and vision of the project should be regularly reviewed and agreed with your Director General. You are expected to run your project in accordance with the Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery and the other Functional Standards as applicable to this programme.

Financial, Commercial and Project Delivery authority

Your financial and commercial delegated authority are provided to you from your CEO set out separately from this letter. You may have been delegated financial and commercial authority and so be authorised to approve expenditure up to your allocated budget as set out in the department's budget allocations. Please confirm what delegated authorities are in place for the programme. You are responsible for seeking authority from relevant budget holders for spend on this project, where it is more than your own delegated financial authority. The whole life cost for the Schools Commercial Programme is £154.15M including VAT over 5years, delivering a ROI of £618.89m.

SRM	21-22 Budget Re-Structure (July 2021)
Payroll	
Get Help Buying for Schools - Payroll	1,802,308
Direct Delivery – Energy - Payroll	353,829
Post Pilot Hubs NW-SW - Payroll	92,268
Commissioning Team - Payroll	313,556
Commercial Support Unit - Payroll	500,000
Sub-Total	3,061,961
Non-Payroll	
Post Pilot Hubs NW-SW	3,611,585
Get Help Buying for Schools	1,585,994
Comms and Sector Engagement	100,000
Direct Delivery – Energy	171,744
Direct Delivery – Commissioning	243,698
Cyber - Non-Payroll	247,000
Sub-Total	5,960,021
Total	9,021,982

Core Admin	21-22 Budget
Payroll	
Category Management	803,077
Engagement and Outreach	652,496
Digital & Insight	530,018
Commercial Support Unit	152,409
Travel & Subsistence	32,000
Total	2,170,000

You are also responsible for recommending to your Director General and the Schools Commercial Programme Board the need to either pause or terminate the project where necessary and in a timely manner.

You should always operate within the rules set out in [Managing Public Money](#). HMT spending controls including any [CO spending controls](#) will apply on the basis set out within the [department's delegated authority letter](#). Where the project exceeds the departmental delegated authority limits set by HMT and/or regardless of the value if it is novel, contentious, repercussive, or likely to result in costs to other parts of the public sector, the Treasury Approval Point process will apply.

All cases that need Principal Accounting Officer and HMT formal approval will first need to be referred to your sponsor team in DfE, who will in turn involve Central Strategic Finance for final consideration and clearance and including liaison and clearing approval with HMT spending team.

Where issues arise which, you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these issues to your Director General and the SCPB. When you do that, you have the right to expect the issue to be resolved satisfactorily. If not, you should continue escalating it through the organisation's governance structures until you are satisfied it has been resolved.

Governance

The department's governance structure is there to support you if you have a risk, delivery or performance issue that cannot be managed within your directorate, or that would benefit from further assurance.

The programme detailed in this letter is part of the DfE major projects portfolio and will have oversight from the Performance and Risk Committee (PRC). PRC is responsible, on behalf of DfE Leadership Team, for regular oversight of the department's top tier risks and major projects and programmes.

Your Performance and Major Projects Business Partner can advise and support you in working with the appropriate committees including specialist advice from the risk team on escalating risks to the department's top tier risk register. When you do that, you have the right to expect a joint conversation about how the organisation can support you to reduce or mitigate the escalated risk.

As primary owner, you must ensure that the Schools Commercial Programme secures business case approval from Investco, CO and HMT. You should also ensure that the Schools Commercial Programme remains aligned to the strategic outcomes, costs, timescales, and benefits in line with the approved business case as well as monitoring the context within which the Schools Commercial Programme is being delivered to ensure it remains valid.

Assurance

You will be required to undertake internal and external assurance reviews which are an essential part of successful project delivery. The reviews are often required for formal [HMT approvals](#) or business case approval points and they also provide support and constructive challenge to SROs. Further advice and support on assuring your project is available through your Portfolio Lead.

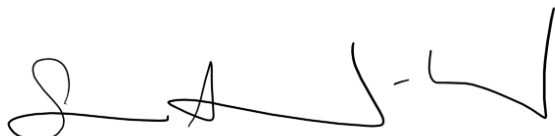
You are responsible for making sure that you are appropriately skilled and able to execute the functions outlined in this letter. If you need additional support or training, please contact your Portfolio Lead in the first instance.

Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA)

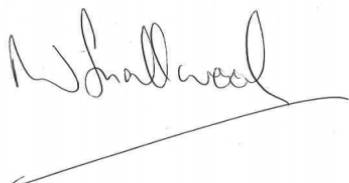
As agreed with the IPA Professions Team, due to your temporary appointment to cover maternity leave and the Schools Commercial Programme Director, Matt Gage, has attended MPLA, you will not be required to complete the MPLA. We recommend attending the SRO Fundamentals course being established by the IPA for new or recently appointed SROs and have put forward your name.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you success in your role as SRO.

Yours sincerely



Permanent Secretary, Department for Education



Chief Executive, Infrastructure and Projects Authority

CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF APPOINTMENT

I confirm that I accept the appointment as Senior Responsible Officer for the Schools Commercial Programme, including my personal accountability for implementation of the project, as set out in the letter above.

Name of SRO: Susan Dawson



Signature of SRO:

Date: 19th November 2021