



Accounting Officer Memorandum

Prison Education Programme

Accounting Officers have a standing responsibility to scrutinise significant policy proposals, projects or programmes and ensure the actions of the public organisation they lead meet the four Accounting Officer standards of *regularity, propriety, value for money, and feasibility* - as set out in *Managing Public Money*.

From April 2017, the government committed to making a summary of the key points from these assessments available to Parliament when an Accounting Officer has conducted an assessment of a project or programme within the Government's Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

Background and context

In 2016, Dame Sally Coates conducted a major review of prison education. The Coates review identified

31 recommendations to improve the delivery of education within prisons, all of which were accepted in principle by the Government. Plans to implement many of them were set out in the subsequent white paper, *Prison Safety and Reform*.

The Prison Education Programme was established to implement the Government's white paper commitments. The Programme's Outline Business Case considered several delivery models before identifying a preferred option: governor-led education provision within grouped management structures. This model incorporates central procurement of a Prison Education Framework (PEF) for delivery of the core common curriculum alongside a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), which will deliver bespoke education and training which is responsive to the local or national labour market. The DPS opens up opportunities for smaller or local providers to deliver education and training in prisons.



The Programme Full Business Case was approved by the MoJ investment Committee on 19 July 2018. The new contracts were subject to a phased mobilisation, beginning in September 2018, with service commencement on 1 April 2019.

Due to the value of investment in education services over the next six years at c£986m, and the programme's inclusion in the GMPP, an Accounting Officer Assessment was required.

Assessment against the accounting officer standards

I considered that the Prison Education Programme met the four accounting officer tests.

Regularity

The provision of education in prisons is a statutory duty. Section 86(1) of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 requires the Secretary of State to secure the provision of education and training that he considers appropriate and suitable for adult prisoners.

The ambit of the vote in the 2018-19 Main Estimate describes spending on education services as "the provision of education and learning service for prisoners".

My assessment was that the accounting officer Regularity test was satisfied. There were appropriate and sufficient legal powers for education provision, and spending on education is covered in the Supply Estimate ambit of the vote.

Propriety

The Prison Education Programme has complied with all Departmental and Governmental governance and assurance requirements, and PEF suppliers have been tested for their ability to deliver on quality and price. All suppliers have been assessed to ensure they are financially stable and able to deliver within agreed budgets. This provides assurance that the use of public funds is sound.

The total value of the contracts is capped at the yearly MoJ planning value, and cannot exceed budget. This provides assurance that resource will be used efficiently and remain affordable and will not breach internal MoJ budgetary control.

Governance has been adhered to, suppliers have been subject to detailed financial evaluation, and contracts are capped at a maximum value to ensure spending is controlled. Our assessment is that the accounting officer Propriety test is satisfied.

Value for Money

Value for money has been a central consideration throughout the development of the business case and subsequent procurement.

Total funding available for the 4 + 2-year contract is c£986m. This includes funding that can be flexed for frontline services PEF and DPS, National Careers Service, Libraries, and provision for contract management resource. Each contract year includes an uplift for inflation.

The Programme's financial controls are set at the right level, and the Programme is affordable within the current and future MoJ planning allocations.

My assessment is that the accounting officer Value for Money test was satisfied. It was demonstrated to me that the programme represented a good use of public funds for the Exchequer as a whole, and was affordable.

Feasibility

There was a dedicated Programme Board and Team in place with key representatives from the operational business and key functional areas.

All Programme milestones had so far met and remained on track for successful future delivery. Although the timeline for delivery was tight, it was achievable, and a dedicated Programme team was in place for the remainder of the mobilisation period.

My assessment was that the accounting officer Feasibility test was satisfied. All programme milestones had been met and were on track for future delivery. A Gateway Review 4 – Readiness for Service, was recently undertaken, and the Programme was assessed as green for delivery confidence, and amber – green for contract management and benefits realisation.

Conclusion

The Prison Education Programme is a robust and effective use of public resources.

As the Accounting Officer for the Ministry of Justice, I considered this assessment of the Prison Education Programme and approved it on 20 July 2018.

Please note that there was a delay between the completion of the Accounting Officer Assessment and the completion of this summary for publication, as the Department has been embedding a new Accounting Officer process.

I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of PEP, I undertake to prepare a revised summary, setting out my assessment of them.

This summary will be published on the government's website (GOV.UK). Copies will be deposited in the Library of the House of Commons, and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Richard Heaton

Signature: 

Date: 23 July 2019