



Department  
for Education



Infrastructure  
and Projects  
Authority

To: **Kathryn Cropper** Senior Responsible Owner for the **Higher Technical Education (HTE) Programme**

From: **Susan Acland-Hood** Permanent Secretary of Department for Education and  
Nick Smallwood, Chief Executive Officer of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority

February 2024

Dear **Kathryn**

**APPOINTMENT AS SENIOR RESPONSIBLE OWNER FOR HIGHER TECHNICAL EDUCATION (HTE) PROGRAMME**

We are writing to confirm your appointment as Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the **HTE programme** with effect from July 2023. This letter sets out your responsibilities and the support you can expect from your department and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

As SRO, you are directly accountable to your Director General, under the oversight of the Permanent Secretary as accounting officer for Department for Education, and the Minister of State for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education.

Your programme forms part of the DfE Major Projects Portfolio under the oversight of the Chair of the Performance & Risk Committee and is included in the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP).

You have personal responsibility for the delivery of the HTE programme and will be held accountable for the delivery of its objectives, with policy intent and outcomes expected. This encompasses securing and protecting its vision, ensuring that it is governed responsibly, reported on honestly, escalated appropriately and for influencing the context, culture, and operating environment of the programme. You are also responsible for ensuring the ongoing viability of the programme and recommending its pause or termination if appropriate. Where issues arise which, you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these to Performance and Risk Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee.

You remain accountable to Ministers, as set out in the Civil Service Code, and should deliver the project in accordance with the objectives and policy intent as set by Ministers.

In addition to your internal accountabilities, SROs for GMPP projects and programmes are personally accountable to Parliamentary Select Committees. This means that, from the date of this letter, you will be held personally accountable to and could be called by Select Committees to account for and explain the decisions and actions you have taken to deliver the HTE programme.

It is important to be clear that your accountability relates only to implementation, within the agreed terms in this letter; it will remain for the Minister to account for the relevant policy decisions and development.

More information on this is set out in [Giving Evidence to Select Committees - Guidance for Civil Servants](#), sometimes known as the Osmotherly Rules. Information on the roles and responsibilities of the SRO are detailed in the Infrastructure and Project Authority's guidance on [the role of the senior responsible owner](#). You should also make yourself familiar with the [Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery](#), the requirements of the Government Project Delivery Framework, and the guidance and requirements for project delivery as set by the Performance and Major Projects portfolio office.

### **Time commitment and tenure**

This role will require 100% of your time to enable effective delivery of the role and execute your responsibilities in full.

You are required to undertake this role until achievement of closure of the first phase of HTE Programme reforms, planned for September 2027. Progress towards this will be reflected in your personal objectives. Any changes to the agreed time commitment or tenure of the role, as set out above, will require both departmental and Infrastructure & Projects Authority consent.

### **Objectives and performance criteria**

Our Higher Technical Education reforms are underpinned by the 2016 Sainsbury Review into Technical Education with the aim to grow and raise the uptake of high-quality Levels 4/5 courses, with Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) as flagship technical courses offering attractive, employer-focussed alternatives to traditional 3-year degrees.

Any proposed changes to scope which impacts on this intent or the realisation of benefits must be authorised by Higher Technical Education Board and may be subject to further levels of approval.

The key programme objectives are to:

- Drive up the quality, employer focus and understanding of the value of higher technical skills through the roll-out of approved Higher Technical Qualifications as the flagship product in an expanded and diverse Level 4-5 market.
- Improve the scale, diversity and quality of L4/5 provision through up to £123,649,000 of support for providers and better incentives for growth, as well as non-financial support. This will include the Skills Injection Fund, Open University validation project, and Strategic Priorities Grant funding.
- Prime the learner and employer markets by increasing demand for study of Level 4/5 skills. In the short-term by boosting starts through targeted messaging/engagement and comms, and in the long-term through establishing HTE as an essential part of Information and Guidance and employer workforce strategies.
- Build a system fit for the future, including preparing for the introduction of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE).

Your personal objectives and performance criteria which relate to the programme are:

- To provide overall leadership and strategic direction to the programme.

- To be accountable for ensuring that the scope and objectives of the programme remain aligned with the strategic aims of Government and the Department.
- To be accountable for the ongoing viability of the programme.
- To be accountable for the delivery of the programme objectives and the realisation of agreed benefits.
- To be accountable for the oversight of risk across the programme and its effective management.
- To be accountable for ensuring that the programme has a robust governance and assurance regime in place at all times.
- To engage key stakeholders in support of the achievement of the programme strategic objectives and to communicate a clear vision for the programme.

You are expected to run your project in accordance with the [Government Functional Standard for Project Delivery](#), the other [Functional Standards](#) as applicable to this programme and the requirements of the Government Project Delivery Framework.

## **Extent and limit of accountability**

### Finance and Controls

HM Treasury spending controls will apply on the basis set out within the department's delegated authority letter. Where the programme exceeds the delegated authority set by HM Treasury, the Treasury Approval Point process will apply, and the details of each approval process must be agreed with your HM Treasury spending team. You should consult departmental finance colleagues on how to go about this.

You should note that where expenditure is considered novel, contentious, repercussive, or likely to result in costs to other parts of the public sector, HM Treasury approval will be required, regardless of whether the programme expenditure exceeds the delegated authority set by HM Treasury. If in doubt about whether approval is required you should, in the first instance, consult departmental finance colleagues before raising with the relevant HM Treasury spending team.

The overall estimated budget, resourcing requirements and tolerances for your project/programme will be agreed as part of the approval process. You will be expected to deliver within these tolerances and report quarterly on these as part of GMPP reporting.

You should operate at all times within the rules set out in [Managing Public Money](#). In addition, you must be mindful of, and act in accordance with, the specific HM Treasury delegated limits and Cabinet Office controls relevant to the HTE programme. Information on these controls can be found here: [Cabinet Office controls](#).

### Delegated authority

You are authorised to:

- approve expenditure of £95,786,000 for the whole life costs of the programme to the financial year 2024 - 2025.
- agree programme rescheduling within scope of agreed milestones, but rescheduling beyond that must be agreed with your Director General, the Technical Education Reform Board, the Higher Technical Education delivery board and Investment Committee or Performance and Risk Committee subject to level of scope change; and
- recommend to your Director General, the Technical Education Reform Board, and the Higher Technical Education delivery board the need to either pause or terminate the programme where necessary and in a timely manner.

These authority limits are subject to change and other conditions, or tolerances may be set as part of the business case approval and ongoing monitoring processes which you should then operate within.

Where issues arise which take you outside of these authority limits which you are unable to resolve, you are responsible for escalating these issues to the Director General, the Performance and Risk Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee.

## **Appointments**

You should appoint a full-time programme director to support you in the management of this programme and make other appointments as required for the control and delivery of your programme within your delegated authority.

## **Governance and assurance**

You should pay attention to ensuring effective governance for your programme, including the establishment of a programme board with appropriate membership and clear terms of reference.

As primary owner, you must ensure that the programme secures business case approval from Investment Committee including CO and HMT. You should also ensure that the 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 programme is being delivered to ensure it remains valid.

Where a change impacts the scope, costs, benefits, or planned delivery milestones agreed as part of an agreed business case, you are responsible for following the agreed change request approval process and setting a new, approved, business case baseline.

You should ensure that an accounting officer assessment is completed alongside the approval of the Outline Business Case, and a summary of key points from the assessment should be published on GOV.UK as part of the government's transparency requirements on major projects, your Finance Business Partner will be able to assist with this. You are responsible for bringing to the attention of the accounting officer any material changes in the programme which could require a new accounting officer assessment to be completed and published. [Guidance on completing accounting officer assessments](#) for major projects is available from HM Treasury.

Although you are directly accountable for this programme, you are also expected to support delivery of the department's overall strategic objectives. This means that you are expected to work collaboratively with other SROs and project directors in adjacent projects and programmes and with the Performance and Major Projects portfolio management office and portfolio director to manage dependencies, resources, schedules, and funding to support delivery of the overall change the department needs to achieve its strategic objectives.

You should ensure that appropriate and proportionate assurance is in place and agree on the level and frequency of assurance reviews through the maintenance of an integrated assurance and approvals plan. You should develop this plan and its maintenance in collaboration with the Departmental Assurance Coordinator and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

## **Programme status, reporting and transparency requirements**

The programme status at the date of your appointment is reflected in the most recent quarterly return on the programme to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and is the agreed position as you assume formal ownership of the programme.

You are responsible for ensuring the honest and timely reporting on the position of the programme to the Infrastructure and Projects Authority while it remains on the GMPP and for providing reports and information to the Performance and Major Projects portfolio management office as required. Reporting should include carbon measurement, and other sustainable development goals demonstrating evidence that the project contributes to an overarching environmental strategy and is aligned with defined Net Zero pathways. Information on the programme will be published annually by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

As part of the government's commitment to transparency on major infrastructure projects, you are responsible for publishing on GOV.UK:

- A summary of the accounting officer assessment completed in line with the approval of the Outline Business Case and summaries of any subsequent assessments should they be required.
- A summary of the HM Treasury approved Full Business Case.
- A close out report after the programme has completed.

## **Development and support**

As SRO of a GMPP project/programme, you are required to complete the Major Projects Leadership Academy, and you have enrolled on cohort 40. The Head of Profession in DfE can provide further information on the application process.

To widen experience and understanding of the role, SROs are also expected to become accredited assurance reviewers and to lead or participate in such reviews for other government departments, the wider public sector, and other areas of the Department for Education as appropriate. Becoming an assurance reviewer and completing a review will form part of your time at the Major Projects Leadership Academy. To maintain your accreditation, you will be required to participate in a review at least once every 12 months.

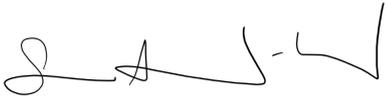
The department will assist you in securing the necessary resources to support the programme, and will set clear guidance, requirements and standards, which align to the [Government Functional Standard on Project Delivery](#), to enable good governance and effective delivery. You will be part of the department's cohort of major project leaders who will be expected to support each other, share good practice and lessons learned and to collectively develop solutions. You should liaise with the department's Head of Profession for project delivery to discuss the maintenance and development of your delivery and leadership skills.

The Infrastructure and Projects Authority will be available to you for support, advice, and assurance throughout the programme's time on the GMPP.

Following approval of the business case and entry onto the DfE Major Projects portfolio, the Performance and Risk Committee, and the Audit and Risk Committee will provide ongoing oversight and support and will take steps to help resolve and escalate risks, issues or constraints that are acting as a blocker to successful delivery.

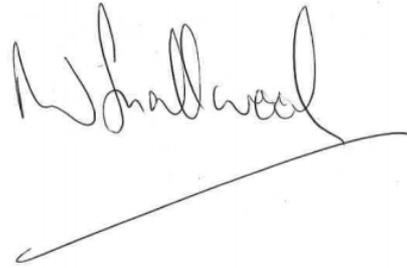
We would like to take this opportunity to wish you every success in your role as SRO.

Yours sincerely,



**SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD**

Permanent Secretary, Department for Education



**NICK SMALLWOOD**

Chief Executive Officer, Infrastructure and  
Projects Authority

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**CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF APPOINTMENT**

I confirm that I accept the appointment of Senior Responsible Owner for the programme, including my personal accountability for implementation, as set out in the letter above.



**Kathryn Cropper**

**06 03 2024**