**DOCUMENT 2**

**SPECIFICATION OF THE SUPPORT SERVICE TO THE FREE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME**

**Introduction**

1. The Department is looking for an exceptional provider to support the free schools programme’s important contribution to improving educational outcomes and driving social mobility. The main focus of the work will be on generating high quality applications for new schools in areas of educational underperformance.
2. We are looking for bids that set out a clear strategy for creating and providing a high quality service. Bids must also demonstrate that the provider has the capability to deliver that strategy effectively and provide good value for money.
3. We will grant fund the provider for two financial years: from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2020 (with the Department retaining the option to extend the grant for a third year upon agreement with the provider).

**Background**

1. Since its inception in 2010, the free schools programme has enabled parents, teachers, charities and existing academies to open new schools. Between 2010 and 2017, over 2,000 applications were made to open free schools and there are now almost 400 schools open, with over 320 more already approved to open in the future.
2. The majority of free schools are mainstream primary and secondary schools, but there are also mainstream all-through free schools and other types of free schools, such as those offering alternative provision for pupils disengaged from mainstream schooling, free schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities and free schools for 16 to 19 year olds.
3. Groups interested in opening a new school submit applications to the Department, which is then responsible for assessing the applications and deciding which ones should be approved. Approved groups then enter the “pre-opening” phase. This is the period – typically, two to three years – during which the group sets up its school. Information on the most recent application round (Sept 2016) and pre-opening can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-application-guide> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-pre-opening-guide>
4. Most free schools have been approved into pre-opening through the Department’s free schools process outlined above. However, since 2015, a smaller number of free schools have been created through a process led by local authorities (LAs). This is sometimes known as the “presumption” process and takes place when a local authority has identified that an area needs enough additional school places to warrant the creation of a new school (the law presumes the new school will be a free school, hence the “presumption” process). More information is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/establishing-a-new-school-free-school-presumption>

**Building on the programme’s success**

1. The government is committed to an ambitious free schools programme that delivers choice, innovation and higher standards. In July 2017, the Department confirmed plans to approve a further 140 free schools between 2018 and 2020, around 30 of which will be delivered through the “presumption” process outlined above.
2. In December 2017 we announced in “Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential” our intention to extend the reach of the free school programme to benefit more areas of educational underperformance. We will invite new waves of mainstream free school applications with a focus on reaching more challenging areas that have yet to feel the full benefit of the programme.

**Service to be provided**

1. The primary purpose of the grant is to generate high quality applications for new free schools in areas of educational underperformance. In particular, the successful bidder will:

* identify groups capable of opening high quality new schools in areas of educational underperformance;
* encourage each group to put forward an application for a new school to the Department; and
* support each group in developing a high quality application that meets the Department’s criteria for approval.

The areas of educational underperformance will be defined by the Department during the course of the grant and set out in key performance indicators (KPIs) in advance of each application wave.

1. There are four additional functions to the service:

* to encourage and support high quality applications for new special and alternative provision free schools;
* to encourage and support high quality applications for new schools approved via the local authority “presumption” process;
* to identify and share good practice on setting up and running a new school with open free schools and pre-opening projects (across all geographical areas), with a particular focus on sharing good practice on closing the gap and driving social mobility; and
* to manage the logistics for a small number of the Department’s free school events.

**Value of grant**

1. Tenders are expected in the region of £1.4m to £1.7m (inc VAT where applicable) per annum. Bidders will need to quote for each year of the grant (see requirement H in the Evaluation Criteria – Document 3).
2. VAT will be included in the grant awarded to the applicant. Bidders should indicate if VAT is applicable on any activities, and if so, identify VAT separately in their costings.

**Further information**

Further information on the free schools programme is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/free-schools> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/opening-a-free-school>.