

## **Online Schools Q&A from Webinar and Surgeries**

**Q1.** Will there be a charge by the organisation that undertakes the quality assurance role?

A. The department is currently working on possible quality assurance mechanisms for the QAB. The department will clarify this in due course.

**Q2.** Does the department have any thoughts on how to approach the issue that the providers most likely to pose a risk are those that are least likely to volunteer for the scheme?

A. It is true that high quality providers are more likely to join this voluntary scheme. As a learning process, we will keep to the scheme under review and undertake a more formal review at the end of two years. The department will consider the possibility of whether it should be subject to regulation. This would require legislation, but would make it mandatory for all online schools that meet the definition to register and be inspected regularly.

**Q3.** Does the department know the number of online schools that exist?

A. The department does not have a full estimate of how many online schools provide full-time, or near full-time, education to at least one pupil living in England. An online search has been done and we think that there are approximately 20 organisations that fit the definition, although numbers are constantly changing and it is a possibility that they could increase rapidly. We have attempted to get in contact with all organisations we are aware of, and several have expressed an interest in the scheme.

**Q4.** How due diligence be carried out if the provider is not based in the United Kingdom and how effective will this be?

A. We will carry out the due diligence process as far as we are able with every provider. The due diligence will have to vary location by location, but we need to make as many appropriate checks as possible to ensure that pupils are as safe as they can be. We do have experience of working with providers or proprietors who are not based in the United Kingdom, so will use our experience and build on this as we proceed with the scheme.

**Q5.** Some traditional schools may using online learning, will this be subject to this scheme?

A. We will not include bodies who provide online learning as a small part of the learning that they deliver. These schools are likely to be providing the online learning through an existing registration with the department, such as sixth-form colleges or independent schools. The scheme would only include schools who provide most or all of a child's education using online facilities and do not fall under any regulatory regime.

**Q6.** Where does online tutoring fit?

A. We believe that most, if not all, online tutoring would not meet the definition we have set out in the consultation. Namely, that it provides all, or nearly all, of a pupil's full-time education. So, at this point, we are not addressing this type of education – it would be a separate consideration.

**Q7.** Will there be an official list of all online schools made available to the QAB?

A. As this is a voluntary scheme, the department will not have a list of all online schools. Additionally, as this is a voluntary scheme, only schools who apply for the scheme will be able to be inspected by the QAB. The department will commission inspections for all online schools who apply and pass due diligence checks. All online schools who are accredited will be listed on the Get Information About Schools website.

**Q8.** Will online schools who are accredited be able to use the Ofsted logo to reflect this?

A. No. Online schools will be accredited by the department, not Ofsted.

**Q9.** How many bidders are there likely to be? Is the timeframe to make a bid too short?

A. At this stage, we do not know how many bidders there will be.

**Q10.** Is the timeframe to make a bid too short, particularly with an ongoing consultation?

A. We acknowledge that timescales are close, but we think they are achievable. We want to be able to move forward quickly. Consultation responses will be considered as they come in to allow us to keep to our timelines. The department expects all bidders should already have the relevant experience and infrastructure in place, making it possible to meet the deadline for the bids.

**Q11.** Is public liability insurance the minimum level of insurance required?

A. When submitting a bid in response to the invitation to tender (ITT) bidders will be required to self-certify whether they already have, or can commit to obtain, prior to the commencement of the contract, the levels of insurance cover indicated below:

Employer's (Compulsory) Liability Insurance = £5,000,000

Public Liability Insurance = £2,000,000

Professional Indemnity Insurance = £2,000,000

Please note: At this stage the figures above are a guide and are liable to change prior to publishing the ITT.

**Q12.** Is there anything to prevent multiple local authorities to make a bid together?

A. The department welcomes bids formed by local authorities. If forming a consortia bid then the structure of the proposed consortia, including the lead organisation should be clearly outlined within the application. Local authorities will be subject to

the same due diligence as any other bidder. On the basis that the department will be entering in to a concession contract with the successful bidder there will be a requirement for open book accounting to enable the department to understand the charging mechanisms applied.

**Q13.** Does the department have an estimate of the costs for the QAB based on the number of providers?

A. Twenty providers have been identified, with additional contacts indicating that they are considering setting up an online school. However, we do not have an absolute number nor do we know how many online schools will volunteer for the scheme. A comparison with the current Ofsted inspection costs could be considered, but as a significant part of the work for the QAB could be desk based it may reduce overheads. We acknowledge initial costs will be higher, so both costs and inspection fees will need to be considered using a 2-3 year outlook.

**Q14.** If a school is already being inspected as an independent school, can they provide an online provision?

A. If an independent school was offering online learning to their pupils, in addition to their more 'traditional' education, this would not be considered under the scope of this scheme, but under their existing registration. See question 5 for more details. However, if the provision were an entirely separate entity, it would be eligible to register under the proposed voluntary scheme.

**Q15.** Will the grading system be similar to Ofsted's ratings for independent schools – Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate?

A. Not necessarily. The online schools scheme is likely to be similar to the British Schools Overseas scheme with a 'pass' or 'fail' judgement. We would expect QABs to include a narrative within the inspection report providing detail of the quality of the school, drawing out good practice and how the school could improve. The format of this would be up for the QAB to determine.

**Q16.** For the safeguarding requirements, will it consider the contractual relationships between parents and the school, or local authority and the school?

A. This would need to be considered by the department on the back of the consultation response. Our intention is that safeguarding is as robust as for other types of schools. Part 6 of the proposed standards for online schools includes requirements for online schools to provide certain information to parents and the local authority, where the local authority partially or wholly funds a pupil's place at the online school.

**Q17.** From the department's research, what type of provision is being offered and what are the age of the children attending online schools?

A. The provision offered by online schools is varied, though the most common qualifications being offered are GCSEs and iGCSEs. Most online schools offer secondary education, at least up to 16 with some also offering A-level or technical

courses for 16-18 year olds. Few online schools offer primary provision and those that do tend to start at key stage 2 for children aged 7 and up.

**Q18.** What does the department know about the background of owners of online schools - educationalist, parent driven, tech companies?

A. Our engagement thus far has been with providers who are educationalists. Whilst other owners are likely to be educationalists who may want to set up schools, this does not rule out providers with different backgrounds. .

**Q19.** Is there not going to be a pilot for this scheme, or are the first schools the pilot?

A. The latter. We hope to launch scheme in early 2020, and we will build up a picture of best practice as the scheme develops. We recognise that it will take time for providers to submit their applications and to carry out due diligence. This will allow a lead-in time for the QAB to prepare for the first inspection visits and reports, though we don't know how many providers will apply or how quickly.