Clarification questions and answers for:

[Balanced Schools – do they make a difference to social mobility?](https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/b669bd92-9083-43b5-815a-0c64af1531d4)

**Will you consider extending the 3rd May deadline?**

We are committed to delivering high quality research which, as this question signals, starts with high quality bids. That said, due to time pressures on project delivery, we have worked hard to set up projects for success by moving through the procurement phase with diligent speed. We will not, therefore, consider late bids. If bids do not reach a high enough standard, we will not award a contract and will work on a case-by-case basis to decide whether or how to take the proposal forward.

**Will you accept annexes in addition to the 10-page maximum?**

No. We will not accept bids that exceed 10 pages. If any bids come in beyond the maximum, we will stop reading after 10 pages and will score bids appropriately based on what is in the approved length.

**Can we use a larger proportion of the 10 pages for Sections 1-4?**

If you so choose to allocate your 10 pages differently, we will allow that; however, I would caution you that we expect to see full answers to all sections. I would advise that you look through the evaluation criteria that we will be following, located in the ITT, to ensure that you have sufficient information included to get high marks.

**In Section 6 you ask for references. What format should this be in?**

As noted in the Invitation to Tender, we have requested that bidders submit references (listed in Section 6). Please submit three names, email addresses, and phone numbers of previous clients or colleagues who can speak to your team’s ability to deliver quality and timely research that also produces value for money. Written references are not needed at this stage.

**The Draft Terms and Conditions list many options for various clauses. Which will you choose?**

Our goal in providing draft Terms and Conditions is for perspective bidders to see the options that will be available or discussed, if they have a successful bid. The clauses with multiple options are listed as such to ensure that bidders know what can be negotiated and what may apply. Many of these clauses are dependent on the winning bidder and, as such, we cannot comment on which clauses would be selected. For example, we cannot know which of schedule 3a or 3b would apply until we see what database a bidder proposes and how the management of that data with fit within GDPR compliance. Contract negotiations are scheduled for after bids have been awarded.

**What page length will the final report be?**

We do not wish to limit the writing and research process at this point by putting a page limit on the report at this stage of the process. If historical reference is helpful, past SMC research reports have spanned 25 to 70 pages.

**Do Higher Education institutions need to use full economic costing (fEC)?**

We are looking for the full cost of the procured research, including whether or not VAT applies. Guidance for how to show VAT is found in the Invitation to Tender. We will be evaluating the cost of the proposal based on the full cost, as outlined in the scoring section of the tender.

**Can Sam Friedman, SMC Commissioner and academic, bid for projects?**

The Commission has always had an academic Commissioner as part of its membership and we welcome that insight into our work.

We were always aware that to attract the highest quality of experts to apply to sit on the Commission it would be important not to limit their ability to bid for research projects that might be in line with their subject area expertise.

As such, we are happy for Sam Friedman to bid on Invitation to Tenders that the Commission puts out. We will do the necessary due diligence to ensure that Mr. Friedman’s appointment as a Commissioner does not influence our delivery of a fair and open application process.

We will be consulting with our Commercial Business Team to ensure that we are following all procurement guidelines and minimising potential conflicts of interest. It will mean that Mr. Friedman is not involved in projects in which he has intention to bid, and that the Secretariat will ensure that panels scoring projects for which Mr. Friedman’s bid include individuals completely independent from the Commission and the Secretariat.

In addition, the Secretariat plans to appoint an independent Technical Panel. This panel will be made up of analytic and technical experts who can give the Commission extra support on how we approach our analytical work. This will go some way to ensuring a robust, external peer review and quality assurance process that provides external validity to all SMC research projects, and especially on pieces where a Commissioner is conducting the research. By including analysts who are not social mobility specialists, we expect to avoid conflict of interests in bidding, while still maintaining strong quality assurance processes.

**Will you consider raising the maximum budget that you would consider?**

We would expect bidders to bid demonstrating value for money. If bidders were to clearly identify and explain the rationale behind an increased spend, and how it pertained to the research questions, then the bid would not be discounted. However, the Commission has determined that because this is potentially a first piece of work setting up a more extensive second part, a very good piece of initial work could be done within the specified budgetary constraints.

**Would you be willing to consider bids which seek to address some of the questions in the ITT and others which are related but not identical to the questions specified?**

Bids will be assessed on the basis of the criteria outlined. Specifically, this includes whether the proposal describes a robust method/ suitable approach; the team and organisational experience in conducting research; the presentation of data, findings and recommendations and cost and value for money. Should bidders make a clear and tangible case for answering related questions and how they might contribute to the overall research aims, these will be considered. This piece of work is designed to help us answer some key questions which will set up a more extensive second piece of work on the issue of balanced schools.