**Supplementary questions following the publication of bidding documents**

The following questions have been edited to take out identifying references to individual schools. In some instances, we have paraphrased in order to link related questions, or clarify the purpose of the question. We have taken every step to ensure the questions remain faithful to the original purpose of each query intended by questioners.

**Q: We were looking at the bid documentation and it says that decisions will be made in Feb and March about funding, so when do you expect partnerships to start? Would September 2020 be acceptable?**

A: Activities can commence in Sept 2020. With regards to payments, any partnership that wants to commence activities later than Mar/Apr 2020 (e.g. in Sep 2020) will need to need to present payment milestones as part of their purchase and spending plan (doc ref 2D). The reason for this is that department does not front-load payments; some spend activity (i.e. a payment milestone) will need to take place in order for us to make the 1st tranche payment. That may, for instance, take the form of preparatory work prior to commencement of activities. Your purchase and spending plan will therefore need to outline whether you intend to stick to the published timelines (with first tranches in Mar/Apr 2020), or whether you wish the payments to be made at a later date. We will consider these proposals, and reserve the right to amend payment timelines to best match the timing of your activities, should your bid be successful.

**Q: Is it possible for more than one partnership to apply for funding using the same model? E.g. where an organisation that works with several schools across a city who are keen to participate with local schools, could each pairing of schools apply? Where working with more than one PRU, could each apply?**

A: It is possible to bid in pairs. *However*, please keep in mind that all individual bids will need to meet all of the criteria and submit all documents autonomously (e.g. a unique bid specific to that partnership).

We will assess each bid on its own merits but, as outlined, two of the key criteria (probably most relevant here) are impact and sustainability. Stronger bids may demonstrate wider impact across cities/areas/regions, as well as the capacity to deliver activities sustainably; so we think that where geography allows, bids would be strengthened by the scale of a group (rather than pairing off and potentially diluting the impact of that scale).

**Q: Should we keep the project bid 'tight' – ie. Working with one (or few) partner schools on a single project (allowing a concentration of resources). Or should we broaden – ie. Working with several schools on various projects with different parts?**

A: Partnerships should decide on what is right for them, according to their strengths and available resources. Ultimately this is about the partnership’s objectives, and the best way to achieve those.

Further, our advice is that partnerships should focus on quality over quantity. E.g. prioritise a small number higher impact activities over a high number of light-touch activities that are likely to spread resources out thinly. This approach should help when providing evidence against key criteria, in particular, impact and sustainability.

Another focus for partnerships should be the target group it is intending to have the most impact/ outcome. i.e.  disadvantaged, SEN etc. This will also allow you to measure the impact of your activities on that group in clear and dependable way.

**Q: Please advise on demonstration of mutual benefit – eg. where one school is likely to offer more than it receives. Contributions will not be fully even, even though the partnership will look to move that way.**

A: Please refer to the bidding guidance section on mutual benefit (p20), in particular this extract:

*Mutual benefit does not mean that every school contributes in exactly the same way. Each partner school/institution is unique and is bound by its own circumstances, including size, scale of resources, capacity, and needs. For example:*

* *It is entirely possible that one school contributes financially, another contributes teaching resource, and another contributes curriculum materials; though the contributions are different, they are all helping to advance the partnership.*
* *A school that requires improvement may be a net beneficiary of partnership activities in the first instance, but commits to increasing its contribution as its circumstances improve.*

**Q: In terms of the four activity areas (leadership & governance, teaching, curriculum development, other targeted school improvement activities), is there benefit to showing activities in more than one area, or should we focus tightly?**

A: It’s up to each partnership to determine this, based on its objectives, circumstances, strengths and available resources. Again, we refer to previous answer where we would advise partnerships to focus on quality over quantity.

It’s important for each bidder to consider what will deliver against the four criteria and what will have the greatest impact.

**Q: We have a reasonable handle of impacts, but are using an external organisation to help develop this - can we say this is ongoing work that we are looking to improve and to refine?**

A: Yes, there will be an opportunity to refine Impact Evaluation Plans after a successful bidding process. At this stage of the process, bidders must give us confidence that their plan will be suitable for measuring the impact of activities.

**Q: For the match funding portion of expansion grant, how much detail must be provided when costing out staff time as an in-kind benefit?**

A: It is up to each partnership to decide on how much detail to provide – we do not impose a set level of detail required. We do expect each bid to balance the need for sufficient information to allow a considered assessment at the bid stage, whist being proportionate to the amount of grant being sought.

Partnerships wishing to include staff time in lieu of financial contributions will be expected to cost out staff time as they see fit, and justify those calculations in their bids, in order to ensure a contribution equal to that of the department. We do not require set levels of detail, for example on differential costs according to seniority of staff, or on including/excluding NI contributions, etc. The important thing is to give confidence that the numbers used are justifiable and realistic.

**Q: Can grant be used to pay an external organisation to conduct impact evaluation?**

Grant can be used for this purpose. With reference to clause 41 of the Terms and Conditions, all bidders must confirm that any proposed external organisation does not present a conflict of interest.

**Q: Is this grant programme likely to be a one-off thing, or will schools also be able to bid in future?**

This grant is a one-off at this stage. We are planning to conduct an impact evaluation as part of this programme, which will inform further steps, and which may include the possibility of further grants. Of course, as we cannot be certain of next steps, we encourage all schools to bid and to take advantage of this opportunity.