



The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

Ian Bauckham
Chair, Oak National Academy Limited
By email: bauckham@tenaxschoolstrust.co.uk

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I am grateful for your leadership of Oak National Academy (Oak) and its board. This letter sets out my thoughts on the priority areas for your focus in the forthcoming year, and Annex A, which you have provided, sets out your expected scope for the Oak annual business plan. It should be read alongside your responsibilities as Chair set out in your appointment letter, and the expectations of the Chair of public bodies attached at Annex B.

The DfE and Oak share the common objective of advancing education, training, learning and development of children, young people and learners (and those supporting them) for the public benefit in the UK, particularly to improve pupil outcomes and close the disadvantage gap by supporting teachers to teach, and enabling pupils to access, a high-quality curriculum whilst also reducing teacher workload.

I know that Oak is now focused on delivering the strategic aims that have been mutually agreed in the Framework Document, which are set out again below.

- **Aim 1** - Work with schools, teachers and the wider education system to create, develop and support the use of free, optional, high quality full curriculum packages that are available to teachers and pupils through a robust, accessible digital education platform.
- **Aim 2** - Continue to provide a national contingency for remote education should it be needed in the event of disruption.
- **Aim 3** - Provide a package of connected stretching materials for teachers and pupils through the same digital education platform that is available across the four nations and draws on content and expertise from all areas of the UK.

- **Aim 4** - Establish ONA as a high-performing, well-respected sector organisation that: maintains its 'by teachers for teachers' approach; contributes to the growing understanding of curriculum best practice; is strategically aligned with, but operationally independent from, government; and delivers excellent value for money.

In achieving these aims, the Department's clear expectation – and your clear intention, I know – is that Oak will use **existing expertise and high-quality resources (where they are unpinned by a high-quality curriculum) that already exist as a strong first preference and starting point when creating your full curriculum packages**. Oak will bring together the expertise of teachers from across the country and work with the existing market for curriculum resources, including academy trusts and education publishers. Oak is working to develop a commercial proposition which meets government objectives, including improving pupil outcomes and securing value for money, while also balancing the interests of potential commercial partners. As part of this, I know that Oak is looking to support choice for schools, and signposting users to other high-quality alternative offers from the market. I know you are already beginning constructive dialogue on this with all the stakeholders involved.

As Chair of Oak, we are looking to you to lead the board and provide support and challenge to the Chief Executive and executive team in the delivery of these aims over the coming year. Oak will set out clear plans and KPIs for the delivery of its aims. These plans will allow Oak to monitor the activities and outcomes as set out at Annex B (expected scope of Oak's annual business plan).

In addition to the specific aims set out above, and the expected outcomes described in Annex A, as Oak is newly established as an Arm's Length Body, the department also expects that you will focus on the following areas to ensure that Oak is in the best place to deliver on behalf of Government:

- Building capacity and capability at the executive level, to ensure Oak has the appropriate experience and expertise to fulfil its mission and corporate objectives.
- Ensuring clear succession plans are in place for the board and senior leadership, and providing insight to DfE on the succession planning process to help set out the expertise that the board needs to target to operate effectively. This includes the appointment of Non-Executive Directors.
- Evaluating the performance of the board and directors, and subsequently sharing and discussing the findings with the Board to ensure it is operating at maximum strength.

- Encouraging full board involvement in supporting the organisation to deliver the agreed Business Plan, ensuring a business continuity plan is incorporated within it.
- Investigating and challenging budgetary control, ensuring Oak stays within its Spending Review settlement through rigorous reporting, forecasting and control of its costs.
- Ensuring appropriate and robust governance processes are in place for approval of spend (including sanctioning), which places appropriate emphasis on value for money considerations.
- Working with the department to develop the 3-year strategic plan and annual plans.

I hope that we can continue with the clear, candid and transparent dialogue between Oak (both at board and executive level) and the Department for Education that we have had to date. DfE officials, I know, highly value the ongoing open relationship that they experience with you and your Chief Executive. This will be key to our successful working relationship and I very much value your ongoing constructive approach to such engagement. We should meet formally on the cycle set out in the framework agreement as well as continuing to have a regular informal dialogue. The Chief Executive will also be invited to attend the Permanent Secretary's monthly ALB CEO meetings.

Should you have concerns regarding the performance of the Oak and/or its executive team, please raise these with officials and Ministers. Similarly, the CEO in their role as Accounting Officer can raise concerns about the board's decisions with Ministers if they wish.

Thank you once again for your contribution as Chair. I value the vital work that you are taking forward. I welcome the regular contact being established and look forward to working closely with you and learning of your progress on the areas set out in this letter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kit Malthouse', written in a cursive style.

**The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP
Secretary of State for Education**

Annex A: Expected scope of Oak's Annual Business Plan

The scope of Oak's Annual Business Planning over the next year will:

- consist of full curriculum packages made up of curriculum maps, video lessons, full sets of lesson materials – these are likely to including lesson plans, slides, worksheets, quiz questions, and supporting guidance for teachers;
- cover National Curriculum and other mandatory subjects at KS1-4, though not phonics-specific resources;
- include more than one curriculum package where there are alternative pedagogical approaches in a subject, which robust evidence suggests are valid;
- be suitable for providing a contingency for remote education should it be needed in the event of disruption;
- include specialist provision for SEND pupils;
- continuously improve resources based on user feedback, including specifically where they have been 'road tested' in classrooms;
- make available resources on a robust, user-centred, digital platform that meets GDS service standards; and
- make resources adaptable, both in terms of their content and sequence, with content choices provided within curriculum packages;
- include a stretch offer will be included in these resources which will meet the relevant commitments of the 2022 Levelling-Up White Paper and 2022 Schools White Paper. The details of this work and its timescales will be confirmed after further significant engagement with DLUCH and the devolved administrations;
- continue to make available its current materials - until they are replaced by the new materials or where it no longer has the rights to them - to ensure continuity of its service;
- include the capability to share high-quality alternative curriculum materials from the wider sector and signpost to where users can access any supporting lesson materials. The number of maps will balance considerations of promoting high-quality parts of the market and not overwhelming teachers with choice; and should be informed by feedback from the market.

Quality of Full Curriculum Packages

The quality of the full **curriculum packages**, perceived as well as actual, is paramount for securing engagement from teachers and for this engagement to translate into improved pupil outcomes. We will develop a quality framework, in close consultation with subject advisory groups, and evolving this further through testing and feedback that ensures full curriculum packages are:

- carefully-sequenced;
- coherent, within packages; across key-stages in a subject; and, where beneficial, across related subjects;
- appealing and user-friendly;
- based on the best-available evidence and in line with knowledge-rich curriculum principles;
- aligned with the National Curriculum;
- compliant with Government accessibility standards, safeguarding rules, and copyright law;
- created with due regard to DfE's non-statutory curriculum guidance;
- not static, but continuously improved in response to testing, feedback and user data.

Establishing an effective process for drawing on experts in the sector will be crucial for both ensuring quality and securing credibility. We will convene 'subject advisory groups' to support the development of the resources, which we expect will consist of experts from the academic subject community who advocate an evidence-based approach to curriculum.

It will be important to ensure the subject advisory group process is seen to be open and transparent, a point also reflected in feedback from the sector. As such, we will run an open application process to select some of the members, alongside direct selection. We will also continue to work with DfE teams to draw on their experience in working with sector experts, and in order to support strategic alignment with DfE.

Production of Full Curriculum Packages

Wherever possible, we will contract with a broad range of providers to develop the full curriculum packages, selecting them via open and competitive procurement processes which are compliant with Government commercial rules.

The process for producing the materials with the providers should:

- Use existing high-quality lesson materials **that are aligned with a carefully sequenced curriculum** where possible, so that ONA is starting from the best the market has to offer and not unnecessarily reinventing the wheel; and
- Strive for the highest quality standards, including coherence, useability and accessibility;
- Encourage wide participation in the procurement process, including from providers whose non-participation could undermine the quality of the resources or ONA's credibility in the sector;

- Select a broad range of providers, reflecting and representing the breadth of the sector, whilst subject, of course, to considerations of the quality and value for money of bids;
- Draw on a large number of teachers to develop the materials;
- Empower providers to channel the diverse perspectives, approaches and styles they will bring into the resources they deliver, encouraging innovation, stimulating debate, and avoiding excessive homogeneity.

Prior to the launch of the procurement, we will undertake a robust market testing exercise on our plans. Should it become clear that our proposals are not likely to achieve the principles above, then we will amend the plans in consultation with DfE. If significant changes in approach are required we will consider, with DfE, whether ministerial agreement is appropriate and required.

As the value of the procurement will be higher than our delegated commercial authorities, we will need to follow the usual business case process with the appropriate DfE investment committee, working with the relevant DfE teams, throughout.

In instances where it has been proven that procurement or development of high-quality resources from an external partner has not been possible we can produce and improve a limited number of resources internally to ensure the quality required is achieved, or to ensure that broad curriculum coverage can be maintained.

Timelines

The Full Curriculum packages will be delivered on the following timelines:

- Maths, English, Science, History, Geography and Music, all at KS1-4, should be in the first tranche of subjects. This means the curriculum maps and exemplar units (at least one per package) will be published by September 2023, with full packages published by September 2024.
- For the second tranche, covering remaining subjects, the maps and exemplar units should be published by September 2024, and the full packages by September 2025.
- The stretch materials will be in a separate tranche, with materials going live from 2024. It is expected the completed package will be available in 2025.

Strategic Relationships and Wider Engagement

We will establish formal working relationships with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Ofsted and the lead providers of professional development including the National Institute of Teaching and the Teaching School Hubs Council.

In addition we will engage widely with schools and teachers, promoting engagement with our offer, supporting its effective implementation and, more broadly, encouraging high-quality curriculum thinking and the pedagogical principles articulated in our resources. This is important as, ultimately, ONA's success will be judged on its impact on teachers and pupils, not simply on the perceived quality of its resources. We will collaborate with DfE communications teams, as appropriate, to ensure strategic alignment.

We will work collaboratively with the wider commercial curriculum market, including BESA and PA, taking reasonable steps, in line with our other objectives, to support the market's future development including by:

- ensuring appropriate licensing to allow use of Oak's resources;
- licensing Oak's codebase on an open source basis, where appropriate;
- sharing research and anonymised data collected by the curriculum body with commercial organisations;
- engaging with commercial providers offering aligned Continuing Professional Development and complementary products.

Annex B: Governance expectations of the Chair

The Department for Education (DfE) expects the Chairs of its ALBs to lead their boards in an effective and collegiate manner, and to adhere to best practice corporate governance standards where possible in undertaking their roles. It is your responsibility, as Chair of the ONA to lead the board, and ensure that it undertakes all of its responsibilities as set out in the Articles of Association and Framework Document.

Your responsibilities are to act in accordance with the highest standards of corporate governance, and are complemented by requirements and expectations of you by HM Government. Below is a list of some of the core governance expectations of the DfE regarding your duties as Chair. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and does not supplant any responsibilities set out in ONA's governing documentation:

Set the board's agenda

You should set the ONA board's agenda in good time ahead of a board meeting. There should be sufficient visibility of items for forthcoming meetings to allow board members, and stakeholders, as necessary, to prepare and engage with the board. The agenda should focus upon ONA's strategy and any policies as set by DfE. In addition, the board's agenda should interrogate ONA's ongoing performance, culture, and value for money, all while being cognisant of its overall accountability to the Responsible Minister, Parliament and, ultimately, the taxpayer.

Encourage engagement from board members

You should encourage board members to engage with ONA both within board meetings, through active participation in discussions and decisions, and more widely. You should encourage board members to join board committees where they can add value. You should support board members to contribute their expertise where relevant to ONA on an ongoing basis. You should foster effective relationships based on trust, mutual respect, and open communication between board members and the Executive team, both inside and outside of the boardroom. You should monitor and manage conflicts of interest among board members in order that the board may function appropriately, in accordance with the conflicts of interest policies of DfE and ONA.

Foster relationships between the board and stakeholders, including government

You should be the principal point of contact between stakeholders and the board. You should foster constructive relationships with all relevant stakeholders to ONA. You should also maintain a constructive relationship with DfE in the course of your work.

Develop a strong working relationship with the Chief Executive

The relationship with the Chief Executive is key to the long-term success of ONA. You should provide support and advice to the Chief Executive, while respecting their executive responsibility. You should work with the

Chief Executive to consider the strength of the broader executive team. Under your leadership, the board should consider executive succession planning on a regular basis.

Work with HM Government on the composition of the board, and the appointment of new board members

You should consider the composition of the board in line with the requirements of ONA on a continual basis, providing regular feedback to DfE as appropriate. You should work with DfE to consider appointments to the ONA board. You should engage in the appointment process as appropriate as per the agreed framework, and in compliance with rules or regulations governing appointments to the ONA board.

Provide mentoring and an induction to new board members

You should lead the induction to new board members on behalf of ONA. You should make sure new board members are introduced to all relevant people both within ONA and among stakeholders. This should be done in cooperation with DfE. The induction process should familiarise new board members with ONA and its overall governance framework.

You should encourage board members to develop their knowledge and skills

You should continually consider the knowledge and skills that the board requires to discharge its duties to ONA, this should be considered in conjunction with departmental sponsors. Where the board would benefit from additional knowledge and skills, which can be met without the need to recruit new or additional board members, you should encourage board members to undertake relevant training and education where possible.

Lead the annual evaluation of the board, which should be externally facilitated at least every three years

You should ensure that a review of the board's effectiveness is undertaken on an annual basis. This should be facilitated by an external provider at least every three years. Where the evaluation is not externally facilitated, you should lead the process, gathering feedback from board members regarding the board's functioning. You should also consider how stakeholders, such as DfE can input into the review, to provide comment upon the board's effectiveness in engaging with government and stakeholders. Reviews should produce a written report. You should be responsible for overseeing the implementation of any recommendations arising from a review as necessary.

Evaluate the performance of non-executive board members at least annually

You should undertake a review, at least annually, of the performance of the non-executive Directors on the board. This review should consider their contributions to the board, and the value they add to ONA. You should write these reviews and be prepared to share them with DfE in an appropriate manner. A written review of performance may be necessary to support any reappointment decisions for board members.

Be subject to an annual performance evaluation

You should engage with an evaluation of your performance on an annual basis. You should allow the board to gather feedback on your performance from the perspective of board members. DfE shall gather feedback from government and other stakeholders. This will be collated by DfE and provided to the Principal Accounting Officer in an appropriate manner. A written review of your performance may be necessary to support any reappointment decision.

For additional best practice guidance regarding the role of the Chair, see the “Guidance on board Effectiveness” published by the Financial Reporting Council. This can be found [here](#). For more information on board reviews and member appraisals, please refer to the latest guidance [here](#).