



**Robin Walker MP**

Minister of State for School Standards

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Dear Jeremy,

### **Queen's Platinum Jubilee commemorative book project**

On 17 December 2021 you responded to the Secretary of State's letter of 30 November in which he had set out his plans for commissioning a Jubilee commemorative book as a gift for all primary school children in the UK. I am replying as the Minister of State for School Standards.

I welcomed your response and understand that your officials have contributed and added value to the book as it has developed, in particular to ensure that references to Wales are both more accurate and extensive than they were in the initial drafts. The final version of the book, which was shared recently with your officials, is now with me for consideration and approval before it goes for translation and preparation for print and audio recording.

While this element of the project is progressing well, I am writing about your request that we should introduce an opt-in process to enable schools to choose whether to obtain the book for their pupils. This presents significant risks and challenges, which I shall set out below. It is also possible that your decision that it should be left to schools to choose is based on a simple misunderstanding about the nature of the book, which I hope that I can reassure you on.

The request from your officials said that "*the Minister is not totally comfortable ..... with the concept of the publication being sent directly to every school .... His preference would be that schools opt-in to the process and have an opportunity to order the books if they want them ... he is keen that Welsh Government doesn't directly facilitate that so they order them directly from DfE, publisher or other third party ....*".

I should clarify that the commemorative book has not been designed for use in schools. It is not a textbook or a classroom resource, as it has been represented as by some media coverage. It is a gift to all primary school children across the whole of the United Kingdom, as part of wider Jubilee commemoration and celebrations. Funding for the book, including investment in a dual language English Welsh version, is being provided by this Department at no additional cost to the Welsh Government, and represents how we are ensuring that both the law and language requirements that apply in Wales are respected.

We have taken great care (and officials in devolved administrations and the Royal Household have supported us in this) to ensure that the book is engaging, celebratory, factual and politically neutral in tone and is something that older primary-age children can read themselves or that parents and carers could read with younger children.

In relation to risks and challenges, leaving to one side the potential contractual and financial implications for my Department, the main ones to highlight to you are:

- Capacity to run an opt-in process – Our contractor does not have the capacity, and there is not provision in their contract, to manage an opt-in exercise. This would have to be organised by the Welsh Government.
- Before we tendered for the contract, the Northern Ireland Executive had been considering an opt-in exercise and we provided for that in the contract by ordering a minimum order of books agreed with them but including flexibility to order additional books at a specified cost if required. The Executive would, by now, have run their own opt-in exercise and provided us with the number of books required for each school had they not decided to instead do the same as planned for the other nations i.e. provide a book for every child. These additional books have been ordered.
- Delivery of books would have to be in the next academic year – Contractors have planned distribution based on the current project plan and expected volume requirements (i.e. number of delivery locations and number of pupils in each). This would have to be re-planned and rescheduled but can't be done until after the outcome of any opt-in exercise is known. It's most likely that, by the time Wales has completed an opt-in exercise (then taking into account later printing once volumes are known), delivery would have to be after summer break – by which time primary schools would have had a new intake and Year 6 pupils would have moved to secondary school.
- The book will be available for private sale soon – there is greater potential for parents to buy a book they could have got free of charge if we delay distribution to them via schools.

In light of the care taken to commission an engaging, factual and politically neutral book for primary-aged children, and providing a dual language English-Welsh version for children in Wales, encouraging schools to opt-in at this late stage would be extraordinary. I hope that I have been able to reassure you that this book is not intended for schools and may also have persuaded you to agree that the book should be sent via schools for distribution to every primary school child.

DK Books are working to an extremely tight timetable, with their and sub-contractors' time and resources having been committed, and we need to tell them by 8 March at the latest if

they need to change print and distribution plans. Therefore, I would be grateful for your response to this letter as soon as possible. I would be pleased to meet with you to further discuss this if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Walker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and 'W'.

**ROBIN WALKER MP**

**MINISTER OF STATE FOR SCHOOL STANDARDS**