

Systematic Synthetic Phonics: Public Procurement

24 June 2011

To: Nick Gibbs, Schools Minister, Department for Education

Thank you for your letter of 23rd June 2011 (your ref: 2011/0039714POGibb). We appreciate you taking the trouble to reply personally. However, we are still extremely concerned about the situation.

There is some £50m of business at stake here. Possibly more. You state that match funding is reserved for the approved systematic synthetic products ["SSP"]. But in order to receive this 50% contribution to the SSP purchase, schools have to order from ESPO. This will mean that almost all orders from schools for SSP will go to ESPO: which school in these difficult times wants to lose out from the prospect of receiving outside money to help finance a purchase?

So this means our 989 school suppliers will have no chance of getting this business. Your Government says it supports Growth and is anxious to be seen to be doing everything possible to help SMEs. Yet our members are, in effect, all locked out.

Moreover, you are promoting the use of one supplier and creating – in our view – a position of monopolistic privilege for ESPO. You are not providing open competition in an area of public procurement. This seems to go against everything no 10 has been promoting recently.

In my earlier letter of 31st May, I asked if you were prepared to review your present procurement arrangements for these SSP. May I ask you the same question again?

As you can see, we are very concerned about this situation, and I would welcome an opportunity for a small group of BA representatives to come round to Great Smith Street to talk to you and your officials. I hope that might be possible. Perhaps your Diary Secretary could contact me to suggest a suitable day and time?

Yours sincerely,

Tim Godfray
Chief Executive