

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

23 July 2018

Dear Robert,

RESPONSE BY SECRETARY OF STATE ON *EDUCATING THE NORTH* TO THE EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE

In the two years since I left government, I have continued to be supportive of the government's policy on the Northern Powerhouse, on the basis that steps forward previously would continue. However, my patience has been nearly exhausted by the constant efforts of some to in essence "play the game of the Northern Powerhouse" rather than pursuing anything of substance. I hope that in education, we can now turn a corner under the leadership of the Secretary of State, following the direction set by the Select Committee.

Expenditure from Northern Powerhouse education funding

The letter to you, and the answer to PQ 140739, suggest that the DfE has spent, or committed to spend, more than £70m to support educational improvement in the North. On the one hand this is of course welcome. On the other, however, it is also misleading.

The items of expenditure included in those responses make it clear that the DfE has not created a Northern Powerhouse education fund to support its Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy.

The 2016 Budget announced four-year new funding totalling £80m for education in the Northern Powerhouse. The inclusion of more than £15.5m of spending from the Strategic School Improvement Fund in the north in the answer to the PQ referenced above gives the impression, when taken together with the Secretary of State's letter to the Committee, that this is part of the spending from the Northern Powerhouse education funding. The DfE's own announcement of the Strategic School Improvement Fund refers to it as a new £140m fund. This raises the question of whether it is indeed a new fund or simply a rebranding and reallocation of previously-announced funding.

Similarly, the inclusion of the 'northern elements' of the Maths and English hubs expenditure suggests that the announcements of these national policies was simply a reallocation of funding previously announced.

These programmes are welcome and necessary, but it is against the spirit in which the Northern Powerhouse education funding was announced to use it for the Northern elements of national programmes. The Northern Powerhouse Education Fund should, in my opinion, be used to target the *specific* issues faced in the North.

Proposals for increased expenditure in the North

As I, alongside George Osborne and Henri Murison, discussed during our evidence to the Committee in May, our *Educating the North* report made a number of recommendations. I believe that the first call on the unspent Northern Powerhouse education funding should be an initial pilot of a centre of excellence focused specifically on the transformation of schools in disadvantaged areas, starting in the North East.

As your committee recognised there a number of other interventions that could and should be implemented quickly;

1. The NPP's recommendations to reform Pupil Premium to better target funding for disadvantage and to provide bespoke careers guidance and workplace-based learning for those receiving Pupil Premium funding.
2. Teacher recruitment and retention in the North.
3. How the Government's careers strategy will benefit the North, and the NPP's recommendation to measure schools on the employability and success of their pupils at age 25.
4. The contrast between the success of some MATs in London and the recent high-profile failures of some MATs in the North.
5. Maximising the opportunity to the North of England presented by degree apprenticeships and increasing the level of qualifications/skills at level four and above to at least the national average (the Northern Powerhouse has a lower proportion of workforce at level four and above in the advanced manufacturing, health innovation, energy and digital sectors).
6. The lack of a coordinated Government strategy for the North and the gap between attainment in the North and London since the London Challenge.

I would like to thank you and your colleagues for the clear commitment you have given to helping ensure our proposals are given full and proper consideration. I look forward to continuing to work with you all.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Jim O'Neill
Vice Chair, Northern Powerhouse Partnership