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**Rt Hon David Laws MP**  
Minister of State for Schools

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Cllr David Simmonds  
Chairman, Local Government Association

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15 February 2014

*Dear David,*

**Subject: Regional Schools Commissioners**

Thank you for your letter of 28 January, on behalf of the Local Government Association's Children and Young People Board.

I am sorry that travel problems prevented you from joining my meeting with your colleagues on 5 February.

I was sorry to read of the Board's concerns about the appointment of Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) and hope I can provide some reassurance about these new roles.

The popularity and success of the academy programme continues to grow and we must consider how the system should develop to respond to the increase in numbers. We are evolving how the Secretary of State takes decisions about academies across the country by moving decisions from Whitehall to a Department for Education regional level and injecting sector and professional expertise into the management of the system. The eight RSCs will be civil service appointments and will make decisions on behalf of the Secretary of State within his current Departmental powers and national framework, as any existing civil servant would do. We did not consider a consultation or announcement necessary given that the changes are intended to build the capacity of the Department and provide a structural solution to managing the growing numbers of academies.

The new RSC posts will have a remit over academies only and do not impact on the role of local authorities. No new organisation/regulator or new powers are being created. I will expect RSCs to build strong working relationships with the councils in their area. For example, local councils can share concerns about particular academies with the RSC who can then, on behalf of the Secretary of State, take swift action to drive improvements in underperforming academies. As

I explained to your colleagues at our meeting, your suggestion about RSCs being held to account by councils goes somewhat beyond the intent of the RSC model, but I do want relationships between RSCs and councils to evolve effectively.

Given the wealth of expertise in London, the RSC regional structure is intended to help spread that education leadership across the country. The design of regions is intended to deliver an even split of challenge for the eight RSCs and is not intended to create any new organisational boundaries.

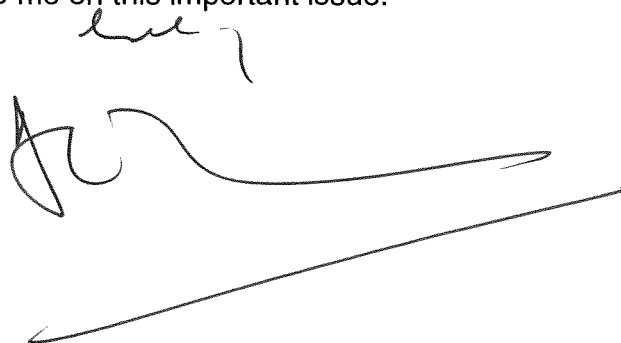
If parents have concerns about an academy, they should continue to contact the academy itself in the first instance. If that does not resolve the matter, the next step is to contact the Education Funding Agency (EFA) which is responsible for dealing with complaints against academies.

We understand the importance of local knowledge in decision making. This is why we want to move decisions out of Whitehall to a regional level. We expect RSCs to bring their own appreciation of their region's characteristics and challenges as well as drawing on the local knowledge of their head teacher board. We expect RSCs to build strong relationships with key players in their region which will help them gather the necessary local intelligence. The introduction of RSCs is not only about making decision making closer to academies; it is also about bringing in proven educational leaders to provide sector expertise and continuing the transition to the system being truly self-regulating.

Following an internal review of the Department in 2012, the Department recognised that changes to the academies system would be needed in the longer term to help us manage the growing stock of academies, and that the associated costs would need to be met from existing budgets. The ultimate cost of the system will depend on a number of factors that are yet to be finalised, including the candidates appointed to the RSC posts, the premises where they will be based and the efficiencies that will be achieved as we reform various processes. I am therefore unable to give a precise figure at this stage but will provide a detailed breakdown when we are in a position to do so.

Thank you for writing to me on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Laws', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**David Laws MP**