

# EDUCATION JOURNAL

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## OECD report highlights UK weakness in vocational education

**T**he Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) last week published its annual *Education at a Glance* statistical volume. While this contained the usual wealth of data about schools, the focus of this report was on vocational education and training, or VET.

Britain is one of the few countries to fund VET courses at a lower level than the average academic course, even though it is more expensive to put on VET courses. The rewards for pursuing vocational courses are also less in the UK than in most other developed countries. While young people getting vocational qualifications are almost at the same level as those going down the traditional academic route, the disparity of rewards grows with age.

Presenting this year's *Education at a Glance* virtually, the OECD's Director of Education and Skills, Professor Andreas Schleicher, said that in Britain this was something that had to change.

Inevitably, the statistics in *Education at a Glance* had all been overtaken by COVID-19 and its negative impact, yet the report was still relevant as it highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on the most disadvantaged. This applied as much to different parts of the world as well as within countries. Angel Gurría, the Secretary General of the OECD, in his introduction to the report, stressed the importance of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in education.

*Education at a Glance* highlighted the strain on resources in schools and colleges. Nansi Ellis, Assistant General Secretary of the National Education Union, said that the report had been a reminder that just a few months ago issues of funding, pay and class size had dominated the education debate in the UK.

While the teacher unions complain about a lack of resources, the OECD figures show that the UK spends more than most on education and British teachers are amongst the best paid in the world. In 2017, the United Kingdom spent more on primary to tertiary educational institutions per full-time student than the OECD average, investing a total of US\$ 14,209 per student compared to US\$ 11,231 on average across OECD countries. This partly reflects a higher level of private funding for higher education, through student loans, but by international standards primary and secondary education are also well funded.

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## A return to normality?

**A**re you enjoying the return to normality that we are now all experiencing? With the number of new COVID-19 cases now almost nil and the virus clearly beaten, schools, colleges and universities are safely returning to normal. As the Prime Minister said just before we all broke up for the summer holiday, and as we reported in large letters in our last editorial of the old academic year: “It is my strong and sincere hope that we will be able to review the outstanding restrictions and allow a more significant return to normality from November at the earliest – possibly in time for Christmas ... By November at the earliest ... it may conceivably be possible to move away from the social distancing measures, from the 1m rule.” So said Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, speaking at the No. 10 Downing Street press conference on Friday 17 July, 2020.

We thought at the time that the Prime Minister’s words were ludicrous, and now that cases are rising and the virus is very obviously not beaten, with schools, colleges and universities facing the disruption of local lockdowns, and classes or whole year groups having to be sent home to self-isolate for a couple of weeks, we find ourselves in a very different place from that predicted by the PM. In the same editorial in July, we quoted the Academy of Medical Sciences, who on the same day issued a statement that said: “Modelling of our reasonable worst case scenario ... suggests a peak in hospital admissions and deaths in January/February 2021 of a similar magnitude to that of the first wave in Spring 2020, coinciding with a period of peak demand in the NHS.”

The AMA modelling has, mercifully, proved over pessimistic. Hospital admissions and deaths in August were lower than the modelling assumed, and although the winter could still be very difficult if winter flu is bad this year, the death toll from COVID is now likely to be less than that outlined in the modelling in July. But COVID-19 is still very much with us and still a serious threat to a smooth return for education.

What the Government needed to do was use the relative quiet of summer to sort out the problems with track and trace. That it has completely failed to do. While testing capacity has increased, it is not by anything like enough and it can take over a week to get the results back. The Government is still persisting with its outsourced centralised call centres for tracking, despite virtually everyone telling ministers that resources should be put into local public health departments instead.

There has been some good news. Our medical knowledge about COVID has continued to increase greatly. One reason that deaths from the disease are now extremely low is that we have become much better at treating those who catch it. Of course another reason is that it is now mainly younger people who are catching COVID-19. As they give it to their parents and grandparents, if the example of France and Spain is repeated here, in the weeks ahead hospital admissions and deaths will rise, although hopefully not to the levels suggested in July’s modelling.

The R rate of infection is now slowly creeping up each week, after some time when it remained flat. As of last Friday, the R rate was between 1.0 and 1.2 while the growth rate was between -1% and +3%. These two different measurements indicate that COVID-19 is again increasing, with a number of towns having introduced various levels of local lockdown. Some upward pressure was inevitable as the original lockdown was eased, and schools and colleges returning was certain to add to that pressure, although not by much. The return of universities could have a significantly bigger impact, especially in cities where there are a number of higher education institutions. Independent SAGE has advised against universities physically bringing students back, although how far young people will be prepared to incur significant debt for just distance learning is another matter.

With COVID news inevitably so dominant, it is easy to forget that other important issues are taking place as well. In this issue we report on the publication of the latest *Education at a Glance* from the OECD. Unusually, this year’s report focuses on vocational education (VET). This is not exactly a strength for Britain. We are one of the few countries that spends less on VET courses than academic ones, even though VET courses are more expensive to run. As the OECD warns, the UK’s approach to VET has to change.





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## School reopening undermined by COVID-19 test delays

**A** SCL leader, Geoff Barton, has warned that the work of schools and colleges in reopening to all students had been undermined by widespread problems in accessing COVID-19 tests. He pointed out that within hours of inviting feedback on the issue in an email to ASCL members, more than 200 school and college leaders in England had reported difficulties with the system.

Mr Barton said that many said that staff and pupils had been experiencing problems in booking tests locally and they were frequently being directed to test centres long distances away, including Inverness and Aberdeen. He added that, several heads had said that home-testing kits had either been unavailable or slow to arrive. The heads pointed out that the difficulty in accessing tests had meant that pupils and staff with symptoms had had to self-isolate at home for longer than may be necessary. They added that the situation had also disrupted the education of the children concerned following the lockdown since March, and where members of staff had been away from school, there had been pressure on staffing cover.

The survey had found that schools and colleges, often with more than 1,000 students and staff, had received a government supply of just 10 home-testing kits, which should: “be offered in the exceptional circumstance where an individual may have barriers to accessing testing elsewhere.” Even when tests had taken place, some leaders had reported that it had taken three days or more for test results to be returned, and when there had been positive COVID cases, a number had experienced difficulty in getting through to local health protection teams for guidance and support.

## Updated COVID-19 guidance for universities

**U** pdated guidance from the Government to help universities reopen buildings and campuses while keeping students and staff safe, includes the advice that SAGE has found no scientific basis that face-to-face teaching is unsafe as long as COVID-secure plans are in place. The Government has already recommended that face coverings should be worn in all communal and enclosed spaces, but universities can choose to adopt the use of face coverings as part of their wider COVID-secure measures, particularly where social distancing cannot be maintained or it is difficult to provide good ventilation.

The updated guidance includes advice on what a provider should do in the event of a local lockdown, track and trace procedures, the creation of new households in student accommodation. The Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan, said that the SAGE group had made it clear that teaching in person was important and fully online provision would have an impact on students’ mental health. She added that where practical work occurred in close contact such as medicine, dentistry and performing arts, universities should follow advice for the relevant professional environment.

In student accommodation, universities will be expected to identify “households” to manage routine contact as safely as possible. Such households in halls of residence would be students living in the same flat or on the same floor who shared a kitchen or bathroom. The guidance also stressed that universities should have strong test and trace measures in place and plans for local outbreaks, whether in student accommodation or in certain academic departments. But Public Health England may recommend additional measures in the event of a local outbreak and across all sectors.

# Colleges best placed to lead a business and skills innovation revolution

**A** survey by the Association of Colleges has revealed that colleges are being held back from supporting business growth and innovation by a lack of funding and a remit from government. The AoC stressed that while colleges that had good links with local employers, had been working collaboratively to support business growth and innovation, they were being held back from doing more.

Nearly 90% of colleges worked with their Local Authority, Local Enterprise Partnership, Local Chamber of Commerce, and / or their neighbouring university to support business innovation. However, well over two-thirds also said that a lack of funding and staff time had meant that they could not carry out more activity.

While the survey found that most colleges had good existing links with businesses that they used to inform their curriculum offer, there needed to be a better understanding of what role colleges could play in supporting the development of new and existing businesses by providing advice and guidance and supporting innovation, including adoption of new technologies.

Colleges had recognise the need to meet local, regional (98%) and national skills needs (80%), to widen access and participation (89%) and support student enterprise and the need to retain skills within their local areas. Colleges had also said that they faced simple barriers to increased innovation activity which could easily be overcome. Three quarters of colleges had cited funding for the capital to develop innovation spaces and to employ business innovation account managers to work with SMEs, which was holding them back.

The AoC is made the following recommendations:

- The Government should provide support in capital and revenue funding and set out a national remit for colleges to lead in the area to initiate a place-based business and skills innovation revolution.
- Colleges needed to secure resources to give alleviation, which would give college staff the time and space to engage in innovation development and research activities.
- Better collaboration would be needed between further education colleges in local areas to share best practice.

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## Ofsted and the CQC to start visits from October

**F**rom October, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will be visiting local areas to find out about their arrangements for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The visits will aim to see the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SEND system and to support improvement.

Inspectors will work collaboratively with local areas to identify what had worked well for children and young people with SEND and their families over recent months, what the challenges and lessons learned had been, and what improvements could be made. Ofsted and CQC will be publishing a series of thematic reports on their findings during the local area visits. Ofsted has published guidance which sets out the details of how the visits will be carried out:

- Inspectors will not be visiting every local area and participation in the visits will be voluntary.
- The visits will not be inspections and they will not replace the current area SEND inspection cycle. Instead, they will provide insights into how the SEND system worked over the autumn term while the area SEND inspection cycle remained on hold.

# Vocational and technical qualification assessments in 2021

**O**fqual has confirmed decisions following consultation on arrangements for vocational and technical qualification assessments in 2021. The Government's watchdog said that it had consulted on proposals to permit awarding organisations to make adjustments to their qualifications and assessments, which had taken account of the different ways the qualifications were used, ranging from those taken alongside, or instead of general qualifications, to those used to signal occupational competency.

Following the consultation, Ofqual said that there had been a high level of agreement to the proposals, and it confirmed that the proposed arrangements would be implemented in full. Dame Glenys Stacey, Acting Chief Regulator, Ofqual, said that in many cases, awarding organisations would be able to deliver VTQs as normal, but where that was not possible, any changes must continue to deliver qualifications that were a valid and reliable indication of knowledge and that they acknowledged skills or practical competence.

Dame Glenys said that Ofqual would continue to work with awarding organisations to support their decision-making on when adaptations would be necessary and what adaptations would be appropriate for different qualifications. She added that Ofqual was already facilitating the development of common approaches across similar sectors and types of qualifications, which would continue.

***“Dame Glenys pointed out that as the Government’s expectation was that assessments would take place during 2020/21, awarding organisations were being allowed to adapt assessments to enable them to better cater for any future disruptions.”***

Dame Glenys pointed out that as the Government's expectation was that assessments would take place during 2020/21, awarding organisations were being allowed to adapt assessments to enable them to better cater for any future disruptions. She said that Ofqual would monitor their plans to ensure that, as far as possible, the arrangements would be able to cope with different potential scenarios depending on the progression of the pandemic. Dame Glenys added that it would therefore not be necessary to permit awarding organisations to offer calculated results for assessments taken in 2020/21.

Ofqual has launched a consultation on its second draft extended extraordinary regulatory framework, which set out the regulatory arrangements and guidance with which awarding organisations must comply when adapting their qualifications. Awarding organisations must consider whether their assessments and qualifications could progress as they normally would, or if there would be a need to adapt assessments and qualifications. This could include widening assessment windows to provide greater flexibility, streamlining assessments to free up time for teaching and learning, or changing some assessment requirements to deal with the impact of any ongoing social distancing measures, such as group performances. However, if they could progress as normal, qualifications and assessments would not be adapted.

Ofqual stressed the need for centres to receive information about adaptations in a timely and consistent way and it added that it would liaise with stakeholders to agree deadlines when awarding organisations would provide qualification specific information to their centres.



# School governance in 2020: finance and funding findings revealed

**G**overnors and trustees have shared their experiences of overseeing their school or trust's financial performance and the decisions they have taken to ensure that public money is well spent in the National Governance Association's annual state of the nation report. Half of governors/trustees had reported that their school or trust had been balancing income and expenditure while over a quarter had been in an in-year deficit and drawing on reserves (28%).

In terms of the school or trust's next financial year, 63% of respondents had reported that their board expected to balance the budget, which was a 13% increase from 2019. The current financial position of respondents' schools and trusts had affected whether they expected their organisation to balance the budget in their school or trust's next financial year. In terms of building reserve, nine in 10 respondents had reported that they expected to balance the budget next year (90%), which had fallen to 85% for those whose schools/trusts were balancing income and expenditure and the figure was down to 42% for those in an "in-year deficit". Only 18% of those currently using a licensed loan had reported expecting to balance the budget in 2020/21.

Many boards were continuing to take difficult decisions in response to financial constraints. as 67% of governors/trustees had said that their board had reduced the number of support staff and a third had reported that they had reduced their number of teaching staff (32%). Spending on buildings and maintenance had also decreased for schools and trusts according to half of governors/trustees surveyed. Secondary schools hit by financial pressures were reducing the subjects on offer for students (40%) and the number of teaching staff (45%), and nearly a third had increased class sizes as a result.

One in five governors/trustees in schools or trusts currently with building reserves had reported that their school still asked for parental contributions as a result of financial constraints, which indicated that it had become a normal expectation on parents instead of a response to extreme pressure.

***"One in five governors/trustees in schools or trusts currently with building reserves had reported that their school still asked for parental contributions as a result of financial constraints, which indicated that it had become a normal expectation on parents instead of a response to extreme pressure."***

Other key findings included:

- 48% of governors and trustees said that it was "likely" that the additional £14 billion funding announced for the school sector in August 2019 would enable their school or trust budget to meet the needs of all their pupils, ranging from 62% in the north east to 39% in London.
- More than one in ten governors/trustees surveyed (13%) had reported that their organisation's business professional did not provide the governing board with advice on financial performance efficiency, or that they had been unaware if they did.

# NEU accuses Prime Minister of failing to address school safety

**F**ollowing the announcement by the Office of National Statistics that COVID-19 cases had risen by 60% in a week, the joint general secretaries of the National Education Union, Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney, had written to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, and Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, reiterating the measures that must be carried out as a matter of urgency to ensure education continued for all pupils.

In the letter to Boris Johnson, the joint general secretaries highlighted the most critical measures that would be needed to be taken by Government to ensure that schools and colleges operated as effectively as possible through national, regional or local COVID spikes:

- Improve the availability of testing and the efficiency of the test track trace programme.
- Report to trade unions of all school outbreaks and look at causes, steps taken in response and what could be learned from them.
- Carry out regular asymptomatic testing of school staff and older secondary students.
- Monitor ventilation in schools and compulsory use of masks in higher areas of incidence where other mitigations were not possible.
- Ensure that clinically extremely vulnerable staff were supported to work from home.
- Make emergency efforts to reduce class sizes, by mobilising supply and younger teachers to take them.
- Source new spaces for schools to enable them to be less crowded and better able to support social distancing.
- Guarantee that all school health and safety costs would be reimbursed centrally.

Commenting on the letter, Kevin Courtney and Dr Mary Bousted, Joint General Secretaries of the National Education Union, said that Boris Johnson had had three months to “get a grip” on the practical realities of getting schools and colleges open and keeping them safe. They argued that the Prime Minister had failed staff, parents and young people and that his wilful disregard for advice offered to him, matched with his regular displays of blind optimism, were an insult to everyone in the community.

Kevin Courtney and Dr Mary Bousted said that school and college leaders, teachers and other staff were worried about access to tests, and many were being advised to travel hundreds of miles to obtain one, which was not a sustainable way to cope with outbreaks. They stressed that schools and colleges must have quick access to trace, track and test, and not be continually confronted with obstacles that should have been resolved months ago.

## Regulator outlines significant cuts to bureaucracy

**T**he Office for Students, has set out measures to reduce unnecessary burden on universities and other higher education providers. Plans include a cut to registration fees, while the National Student Survey will also be reviewed as part of plans to cut red tape on an ongoing basis. Nicola Dandridge, chief executive of the OfS, said that the OfS recognised the difficulties facing all universities and colleges, and it had therefore decided to review its own efficiency.

She pointed out that the aim would be a reduction in registration fees paid by higher education providers registered with the OfS by 10 per cent in real terms over the next two years, which would be done in such a way that the interests of students would be effectively and robustly protected. Ms Dandridge said that as part of the review, the OfS expected the Quality Assurance Agency and the Higher Education Statistics Agency, as the two bodies designated under the Higher Education and Research Act, to deliver comparable reductions in the statutory fees they charged.

She said that in terms of the NSS, the OfS review would seek to reduce any unnecessary bureaucracy, prevent any unintended consequences and gaming of the survey, whilst ensuring that the NSS would stand the test of time as an important indicator of students' opinions and experiences at every level. Ms Dandridge stressed that the OfS remained firmly committed to robust and proportionate regulation, in the interests of every student. She added that any changes the OfS made to the implementation of its regulatory framework would ensure that maintaining quality and improving access and participation for the most disadvantaged students would remain at the core of the its mission.

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## Students supported to return to preferred choices

**D**ata from UCAS has showed that more than 89% of students who had received a higher grade when revised results had been issued by awarding bodies had successfully secured a place at one of their preferred choices, or they had used Clearing to find a comparable alternative. UCAS had monitored decisions made by the students across the UK whose grades had changed following the announcement about centre assessed grades for A levels, regrades for some BTECs, and teacher estimates for Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers.

The data revealed that 155,000 (89% of 174,000) who had received a grade increase had been placed at their original firm or insurance choice university or college, or they had used Clearing, Adjustment, or Extra to find at a place on a course at a university or college in the same tariff banding as their original firm choice.

UCAS said that where it had been able to track the original offer conditions, it had estimated that up to 15,000 A-level students in the UK who had not have their firm choice confirmed on A-level results day may have subsequently achieved the academic requirements of their offer since CAGs had been issued. UCAS said that 87% of those students had been placed at their original firm or insurance choice university or college, or at another comparable university or college, and less than 10% of the 15,000 students were currently not placed.

UCAS Chief Executive, Clare Marchant, said that universities and colleges had moved quickly and flexibly to confirm places for students who had been qualified with their revised grades. She said that UCAS expected more students to be confirmed in the coming days at their original choice, but some students would have made a new choice in Clearing and they would be looking to retain that place and commence their studies in the coming weeks. Ms Marchant added that some students would have also made other plans and they may not choose to take up their place this year.

# Scotland's COVID-19 advisory groups

**A**ll the governments in the UK are facing the same problems over COVID-19 and, as the fiasco over summer exam awards showed, all of them were capable of making the same mistakes as first Scotland, then Wales Northern Ireland and England were tripped up by the possibly impossible desire to be fair to students and ensure no academic drift in grades.

While all the governments in the UK have established mechanisms for consulting stakeholder groups, and clearly it is easier in smaller countries than in England, it is Scotland that has developed the best way of handling the crisis. That didn't stop the exams fiasco erupting first in Scotland, but it has helped all the players involved grapple with some difficult decisions during the course of the pandemic. The Scottish government established a COVID-19 Education Recovery Group, chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education, and made up of the leaders of the various stakeholders from the teacher unions, local government and official bodies. This has meant a greater degree of buy-in for policy, which is quite useful when things go wrong. While the Westminster government looks increasingly incompetent, and not just on COVID, the Scottish government, whose decisions are not that different from those in England, tends to enjoy more support.

Scotland also has its own version of SAGE. The COVID-19 Advisory Group is drawn from Scotland's medical and scientific establishment, who also have input into SAGE, but who can give advised on specifically Scottish dimensions of dealing with the pandemic.

The Coronavirus (COVID 19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues met last Tuesday. It considered advice on ventilation, aerosol transmission, fomites, COVID-19 symptoms in children, and the impact on children of lockdown. It agreed to dedicate more time in a future meeting to considering the impact on children of lockdown. The sub-group considered the first iteration of Public Health Scotland's systematic review of recent research relevant to their remit. In combination with a dashboard of school attendance data this enabled a discussion of the current state of knowledge and practice relating to COVID-19 in schools. The sub-group will review this evidence on a fortnightly basis, to support consideration of whether any of its advice requires to be updated.

The sub-group received a presentation on risk communication. Members acknowledged the complexity in current messaging. To take this forwards, it was agreed to link with the main Advisory Group's consideration of these issues.

## COVID-19 Education Advisory Group

The COVID-19 Education Advisory Group met twice in August, with John Swinney in the chair on both occasions. On 29 August the group discussed staffing absence numbers. Further discussion on the possible mobilisation of "lapsed" teachers (suitably qualified individuals who have maintained their professional development and registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, but are not currently working as teachers). It was noted that there is around a four week lead time to complete all necessary actives to bring a lapsed teacher onboard. Understanding the geographical position of these individuals would help with planning next steps.

The group discussed the approach to Monitoring and Surveillance which covered the current position, the proposed additional studies and the questions these studies would address, and how the different strands under Monitoring and Surveillance relate to each other. The discussion was welcomed by members, and there was further discussion on messaging and communications around this programme. The regularity of individuals being tested as well as the groups of children and young people involved in the testing was also noted.

The last agenda item covered the National eLearning offer. The current collaborative proposition was outlined and looked at what the proposed offer is. It was noted that there needs to be a clear National offer and an understanding of how the different partners can work together to deliver learning. The communication of what this is -and how it can be operationally utilised - is important. The use of language is also important for understanding the offer, whether this is digital learning, online learning, blended learning or remote learning.

The EAG has since produced the infographic on the next page.



As at 6 September 2020:

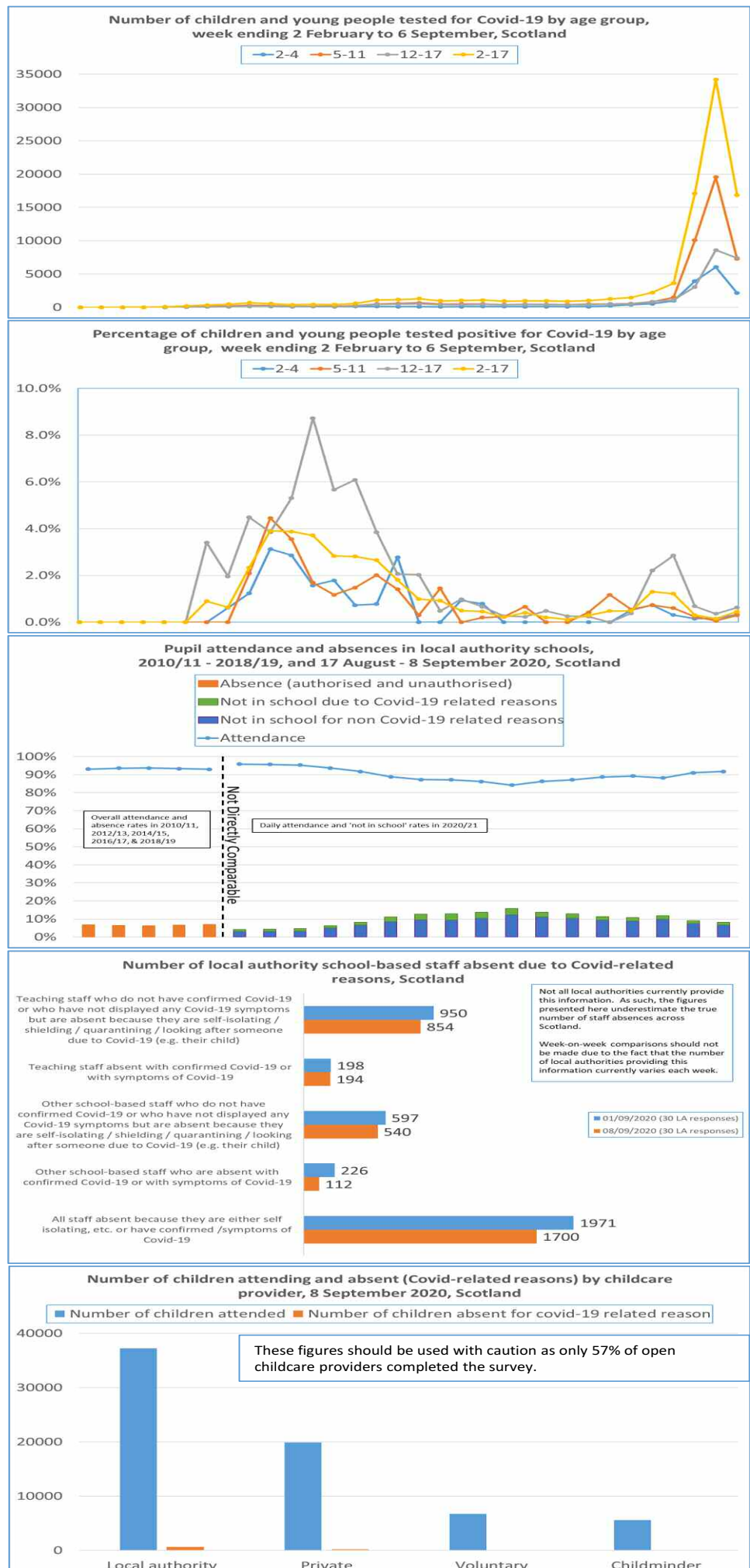
- There have been 461 children and young people aged 2-17 years in Scotland who have tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the outbreak.

In the week ending 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020:

- There were 75 children and young people aged 2-17 years in Scotland who tested positive for COVID-19, among the 16,826 children and young people who were tested.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September:

- Attendance in local authority schools was 91.8%, whilst the percentages of openings recorded as pupils not in school (non Covid-19 reasons) was 6.7%, and for not in school (Covid-19 related reasons) was 1.6%.
- 11,173 pupils were not in school either all or part of the day because of Covid-19 related reasons.
- 1,700 staff were absent due to Covid-19 related reasons, of which, 1,048 were teaching staff and 652 were other school-based staff.
- 69,409 children were attending a childcare setting and 991 had a Covid-19 related absence.
- 20 childcare settings reported being closed due to a Covid-19 related reason.



# Students are being duped by fraudsters posing as landlords

By Robert Brooker

Head of Fraud at PKF Geoffrey Martin and chairman of the London Fraud Forum

**T**his year, the treble whammy of last-minute A-level grade changes, uncertainty of University openings and lockdown meaning students and their parents have not been able to view properties in person has created the perfect storm for fraudsters to take advantage. Students are more frequently turning to the web to find properties to rent during their study, but some fall prey to fraudulent adverts by which, when students enquire about the property, they are asked for proof they can afford the rent.

The fraudulent landlords who post the adverts require prospective tenants to transfer money as holding deposits without visiting the property, or to prove they have money in order to rent by transferring money to a friend and sending proof. Fraudulent adverts most often appear on free advertising sites as there is no cost to advertise the fake property. Rental fraud reports indicate that £22 million has been lost to rental fraud in the last four years.

Unfortunately, panic creates pandemonium and unscrupulous landlords are preying on this. The easiest way to avoid being victim to these scammers is to use your common sense. My advice would be to do your research: go through a reputable letting agency where possible and always ask for references when doing a private rental. If the property looks too good to be true, it probably is!

Follow these top tips to avoid losing out:

- Never pay a 'holding deposit', rent or any money without visiting a property (where COVID restrictions allow). Satisfy yourself that the landlord is legitimate and has rights to rent the property and take a friend.
- Avoid paying money online. The safest way is to make a payment at a letting agents office. A formal contract should be signed before any money changes hands.
- Make sure the advert looks legitimate: avoid adverts with no photographs of the property or where multiple adverts have the same photographs.
- Check the contact details: Look for telephone numbers that are based in the UK. And check that landline numbers work.
- Protect your deposit: Where a deposit is taken other than a 'holding deposit', the money must be paid into a deposit scheme approved by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Ask for evidence of this.

Fraudsters are also getting smarter and more creative and scams are getting more complex. Scammers access social media accounts to learn personal details so they appear more legitimate.

Some fraudsters specifically target international students, calling them and pretending to be from a legitimate organisation (such as the UK Home Office or their university). They demand money (calling it a "fine" for a non-existent immigration problem) and claim that if you do not pay them quickly there will be damaging consequences (for example, deportation or cancelling your visa).

Whenever you receive a telephone call, email or social media request from someone you do not know, remember it could be a scam. Criminals use all kinds of ways to trick you into paying them money or giving them valuable information about yourself. Do not make any payment until you have verified that it is legitimate. Students should also be aware of how much information they share online and keep personal data secure to avoid being a victim of identity fraud.

# Change at the top

By Pericles

**I**t is always ominous for a Permanent Secretary when he opens the newspapers and reads that a spokesman has said: “The Permanent Secretary is not leaving his post and is focused on the job in hand, delivering the government’s agenda alongside ministers and the wider department.” When Jonathan Slater read that in *The Times* on 18 August he must have realised that his goose was cooked.

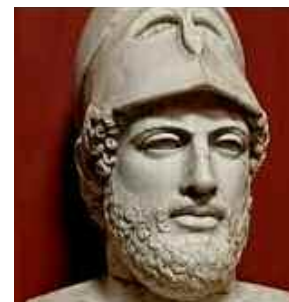
The Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education would also have read in the same article that he “faces being ousted because of concern at the department’s performance”. There was a time when concern at a department’s performance would have meant the relevant Secretary of State was for the chop. Not under Boris Johnson. When Johnathan Slater found a few days later that he was leaving his post after all, he was the fourth Permanent Secretary to leave in seven months, together with the Cabinet Secretary.

There is a clear attempt by Boris Johnson and his senior adviser, Dominic Cummings, to bend the Civil Service to their will. That is not new. To varying degrees, every Prime Minister has wanted to do this. Richard Crossman, a Labour Cabinet Minister in the 1960s, filled three heavy volumes of his *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister* with details of his wrangling with his Permanent Secretaries.

Boris and Dom feel that the COVID crisis has revealed the weaknesses of the British Civil Service, that when they have tried to pull the levers of power nothing has happened. They blame the Civil Service for some of the mistakes in dealing with COVID-19. Is this fair? The evidence is mixed. As Civil Services go, the British Civil Service is rather good. In fact it is ranked as the best in the world. At the end of last year the International Civil Service Effectiveness (InCISE) Index was published. This is a project of the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford and the Institute for Government. It is a sort of PISA for civil servants, ranking the major civil services of democratic countries on a range of activities. Not only did the British Civil Service come first, but three of the next four countries were Australia, Canada and New Zealand, countries whose civil services are based on the British model.

Set against that, seven years ago two of our leading political scientists, Professors Anthony King and Sir Ivor Crewe, produced a book, *The Blunders of our Governments*, which observed that British governments were once greatly admired for delivering the changes that they wanted. Over the years British governments have got increasingly bad at delivering major projects. But is this the fault of civil servants or of their political masters? King and Crewe concluded that it was mainly the politicians, and not just ministers but parliament itself. They wrote: “By failing to do what might be thought to be its duty, Parliament as a whole - and the House of Commons in particular - contrives to be complicit in a large proportion of the blunders that are committed. Government ministers are not the only ones to blame. As a legislative assembly, the parliament of the United Kingdom is, much of the time, either peripheral or totally irrelevant. It might as well not exist.” They wrote this years before the Brexit fiasco and the do-nothing parliament of 2017-19. So, Boris and Dom are aiming at the wrong target. It is people like them that need reform. Johnson’s track record as Foreign Secretary was poor. Cummings is great as a disruptor, as someone who can destroy, but not as someone who can build.

So what of the new generation of mandarins? Susan Acland-Hood is the new Acting Permanent Secretary at the DfE, appointed on 1 September. She was Chief Executive at HM Courts and Tribunals Service and before that Director of Enterprise and Growth at HM Treasury, Director of Education Funding at the Department for Education, Policy Advisor on home affairs and justice, and then education policy at Number 10. She has also held senior roles in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and in the Social Exclusion Unit. So, clearly a bright and able lady. But then senior mandarins always are. The same can not be said for senior politicians. The Prime Minister is in the middle of a bizarre attempt to blow up the negotiations with the EU for a free trade deal, at the same time as presiding over serious failings with track and trace that are central to successfully dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. He chooses this time to reform the senior civil service. Yet it is his own performance, and that of his ministers, that is more in need of reform.



Pericles

## *Education at a Glance* majors on VET

By John Bangs

Chair of the OECD Trade Union Advisory Committee's Working Group on Education and Skills and special consultant for Education International

**I**t is an indicator of the depth of the crisis created by COVID that OECD's Secretary General, Angel Gurría, should take on the responsibility for launching this year's edition of *Education at a Glance* (EAG). While the OECD describes the EAG as a flagship publication and it's full of interesting comparative data, it doesn't normally have the policy elan of PISA or TALIS. This year however the pandemic has changed everything. The EAG's data could have been ditched since practically all of its data was gathered before the pandemic. Gurría, however, was determined to use the data as a warning about the perilous future facing education.

He described the situation in stark terms. All countries he said, however well prepared they were for the pandemic, now face a brutal economic recession. Countries must place education at the centre of economic revival planning if they are to have a hope of being successful. Indeed, he urged countries to renew their political commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly to the Education SDG, in order to underpin a global revival.

It was a clarion call to countries to respond to the impact of COVID and restore optimism and hope to young people. It was also an implicit rebuttal to some of his member countries who are understood to be less than keen about continuing to fund the OECD's efforts to help the UN and UNESCO in their efforts to evaluate progress in reaching the SDGs' goals.

And, of course Gurría is right. Focussing on enhancing learning for the future is the only way that countries can equip themselves to recover from the impact of COVID. COVID-19 has stress tested all aspects of society, and education is no different. In describing the state of education systems just before COVID struck we also know where the fault lines were which the pandemic will have opened up. So, the best way to use EAG data is to detect where the greatest disparities are- whether by country comparison, inequity of provision or by differences in students' socio-economic background, gender or race.

### Major stresses

It is obvious where the major stresses are. Distance learning has its limits and has clearly not compensated for school closure in many countries. Recent research, for example, by the NFER in the UK, has found that the learning gap between rich and poor students has widened by 46% in one year. (*Guardian* 31 August) This has proved particularly obvious in the EAG's main focus this year, Vocational and Educational Training (VET), where many students come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. Take VET courses for instance. In many of them practical and work-based engagement is essential. With institutional lockdown however, practical courses have been almost impossible to implement. Apprenticeships are heavily reliant on employers offering them.

However, as the EAG warns, employers may prioritise business recovery rather than appointing apprentices. The pandemic came at a time when VET already had a low policy profile and inadequate



*John Bangs*

*(Continued on page 17.)*



funding. In short, many VET training courses are disappearing, and apprenticeships are threatened at precisely the point when society's need for VET trained workers is at its most acute.

Despite this, alongside teachers and doctors, VET trained workers have been essential to public services especially during the crisis and will be in future. As the EAG makes clear, VET must now be given equal ranking with schools and universities in a new post pandemic settlement for education. Education unions have a vital role in achieving this.

There are plenty of other examples where the COVID crisis has shown up both dangers and opportunities for education. EAG reports that the number of eighteen to twenty four year old students not in education, employment and training (NEETs) has dropped to its lowest since 2000. With the danger of a huge increase in unemployment in many countries, it is highly likely that NEET numbers will now exponentially increase. Again, education unions have a vital role in setting out a strategy for enhancing education and training for young people who have left statutory education.

In schools, despite the EAG continuing to reflect the OECD's doubt about any correlation between class size and student achievement, the strains of ensuring students' safe return to school have highlighted the fact that schools with historically large class sizes will find it that much harder to carry out full time return. Indeed, the EAG reports that 60% of countries are now organising shift systems for student attendance. As the EAG says itself, 'countries with smaller class sizes will find it easier to comply with restrictions on social distancing'. In short, evidence that large class sizes contribute to teacher burnout has now been supplemented by the need to reduce class sizes for health reasons.

Another issue is that of time spent by teachers on instruction/teaching. The amount of teaching time has changed little year on year but the pandemic's triggering of distance and blended learning and the phased return of students, may well place new and unpredicted demands on teachers which cannot be quantified using previous measures of instruction time. And the demands on teachers are not reflected in their pay/compensation. The fact that teachers' actual salaries are between 80-94% of earnings of workers with equivalent qualifications in other sectors reflects the overall gender gap in pay and the fact that teachers' pay continues to be inadequate.

There is course the issue of school and education institution funding. Unless measures are taken to protect education funding the brutal recession predicted by the OECD will affect it as much as other areas of government spending if not more. Measuring what is happening will be vital, but what is plain from the EAG is that using the Gross Domestic Product as a benchmark for measuring education spending of countries will be increasingly unreliable. GDPs are likely to reduce, in many cases significantly, and it will be quite possible for countries to demonstrate that they are spending more on education as a percentage of their GDPs when in fact education funding is being slashed.

These are just a few examples, for, as ever, *Education at a Glance* is a misnomer since it runs to just under 500 pages! However, throughout it there are pointers which show which parts of Education are threatened as a result of a COVID inspired recession. And the EAG also shows that, despite his imminent retirement in May next year, the OECD's Secretary General will not be leaving quietly.

***“This has proved particularly obvious in the EAG’s main focus this year, Vocational and Educational Training (VET), where many students come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds. Take VET courses for instance. In many of them practical and work-based engagement is essential. With institutional lockdown however, practical courses have been almost impossible to implement. Apprenticeships are heavily reliant on employers offering them.”***

## Education at a Glance

*Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Paris, France. [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

**I**t is impossible to do justice in reviewing a volume like *Education at a Glance*, nearly 500 pages packed full of statistics covering a wide range of aspects about education, comparing the countries of the OECD and its partner member states. What follows is just the briefest of snapshots. This year the launch of the report, which normally takes place at a series of press conferences in major cities around the world, including London, had to take place remotely by Zoom. So did the seminar the OECD ran on this year's volume, where the OECD's Director of Education and Skills, Andreas Schleicher gave one of his famous graph presentations.

*Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators* offers a rich, comparable and up-to-date array of indicators that reflect a consensus among professionals on how to measure the current state of education internationally. The indicators provide information on the human and financial resources invested in education, how education and learning systems operate and evolve, and the returns to investments in education. They are organised thematically, each accompanied by information on the policy context and interpretation of the data.

This year the selected theme for *Education at a Glance* is vocational education and training (VET). The OECD notes that there has been renewed interest in VET in recent years as an effective means to open pathways for further learning and personal growth, and ease the transition of learners into the labour market. There is increasing policy interest in providing comparative analysis of the progression of VET students, the outcomes of its graduates and the resources invested. Therefore, a large number of indicators in this year's edition analyse students' participation and progression through vocational education, from lower secondary to short-cycle tertiary education. It also analyses the economic, labour-market and social outcomes of adults with a vocational qualification as well as indicators on the resources invested in VET, both financial and human. This year, two new indicators complement the set of indicators, offering additional analysis of how VET systems differ around the world and upper secondary completion rates by programme orientation.

Although the provision of formal vocational education and training (VET) can extend from lower secondary to short-cycle tertiary level, more than two-thirds of VET students are enrolled at upper secondary level. In some countries, where vocational education is more common, adults with VET qualifications enjoy high employment rates. However, the employment advantage of a vocational qualification tends to weaken over the life-course. On average across OECD countries, the employment rate of 25-34 year-old adults with an upper secondary or postsecondary non-tertiary vocational qualification (82%) is similar to that among 45-54 year-olds (83%), whereas employment increases from 73% to 80% among those with a general qualification. In contrast, the employment advantage for tertiary-educated adults widens among older age groups. Earnings are also lower: while adults with an upper secondary vocational qualification have similar earnings to those with a general one, they earn 34% less than tertiary-educated adults on average across OECD countries. Poorer labour-market prospects may have contributed to the decline in the share of adults with an upper secondary vocational qualification across the generations: 21% of 25-34 year-olds held such a qualification in 2019 compared to 26% of 45-54 year-olds on average. In contrast, the share of tertiary-educated adults has risen from 35% among the older generation to 45% among young adults.

The countries with strong integrated school- and work-based learning vocational programmes are also those with the highest employment rates for adults with vocational qualifications, even surpassing those for tertiary-educated adults in some cases. However, only one-third of all upper secondary vocational

*(Continued on page 19.)*

students are enrolled in such programmes on average across OECD countries. The duration of the work-based component varies across countries, from less than 30% of the length of the programme in Estonia and Israel to at least 80% in Austria, Finland and Switzerland. The most popular fields of study among vocational graduates vary at different levels of education. While engineering, manufacturing and construction is the most common broad field at upper secondary level, at short-cycle tertiary level, most students graduate from business, administration and law, or health and welfare.

Around two-thirds of OECD countries have introduced pathways for vocational upper secondary students to continue their education at the tertiary level. On average across OECD countries, almost 7 out of 10 upper secondary vocational students are enrolled in programmes that provide direct access to tertiary education after completion. Better prospects for further education may encourage students to complete their upper secondary vocational qualification. Although the share of vocational upper secondary students who complete their programmes within the theoretical duration plus two years (70%) is lower than for general ones (86%), vocational students are more likely to complete their qualification if their programme provides direct access to tertiary education than if it does not. The most common direct route from upper secondary vocational programmes to tertiary education is through short-cycle tertiary programmes, which are predominantly vocational in most OECD countries, but also through bachelor's programmes or equivalent. On average across OECD countries, 17% of first-time tertiary entrants enter short-cycle tertiary programmes. The employment rate of adults with a short-cycle tertiary degree is 4 percentage points higher than those with an upper secondary vocational attainment and they earn 16% more on average across OECD countries.

Vocational programmes are often designed to allow older students who wish to develop new skills to re-enter education later in life. While 37% of 15-19 year-old upper secondary students are in vocational programmes, the share increases to 61% among students over 25. Similarly, first-time entrants to short-cycle tertiary education also tend to be older than entrants to long-cycle tertiary programmes (bachelor's or master's long first degrees).

## The United Kingdom

*Education at a Glance* is an international report, but we can extract data on the UK or, sometimes, only England. (The degree to which the four home nations, each of which has responsibility for education in its area, participate in OECD programmes varies and therefore so do the results of comparative statistics like those reported in this volume.)

As Andreas Schleicher, the OECD Director of Education and Skills, said when presenting the volume last week, vocational education and training (VET) “forms the backbone of society”. Yet Britain is one of the few countries in which less money is spent on VET courses than on general academic subjects even though vocational courses are often more expensive to run. When it comes to lifetime earnings, the UK is again one of the few countries in the OECD where employment for those with a VET qualification is worse than for those with a general academic qualification. Young people with VET qualifications are almost as well off as those with academic qualifications, but the gap widens as people grow older.

Professor Schleicher thought that VET needs to get better connected to tertiary education. In the UK it needs to get better connected to the workplace as well. Learning at the workplace was key, yet that was not so good in the UK. Workplace learning for young people in the UK is very rare, Professor Schleicher said. It works well for older people, which shows better results. Britain invests less in VET than almost any other OECD country, and less than it puts into academic education, and this needs to change, Professor Schleicher said.

In the UK country note published by the OECD at the same time as *Education at a Glance*, the OECD noted that “there is no employment premium for young adults with upper secondary vocational education over upper secondary general education in the United Kingdom. Young adults with a vocational qualification at this level have similar employment prospects to those with general qualifications due to much higher than average prospects for general education in the United Kingdom.” The United Kingdom is one of the few OECD countries where spending per student in upper secondary vocational programmes (US\$ 8,978) is lower than in general ones (US\$ 13,429).

# Governors concern about monitoring pupils who had fallen behind when schools had closed

**O**fsted and the National Governance Association have published a study that would suggest that the business of school governance had continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Governors and trustees had reported that governing schools in the immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis had rapidly adapted to new challenges. While they had been uncertain about the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on pupil outcomes, mental health and well-being, governors and trustees had been confident in their ability to continue to monitor and address the issues as part of their governance role.

The research explored the views of governors and trustees in the months during lockdown when schools had been closed to most pupils, and it looked at how those governing had responded to COVID-19, as well as the longer-term challenges they faced as all pupils returned to school. Governors and trustees said they that they had adopted new ways of working to respond to a fast-moving situation, which included delegating decisions to governing board chairmen and setting up dedicated committees for COVID-19-related issues. Online tools and apps had been pivotal in enabling the work of governance to continue, and while some governors and trustees felt that online meetings had had drawbacks, others had said that online tools could hold benefits for the future, by potentially helping to recruit from a more diverse pool of governors and trustees.

The report showed that the level of support provided to governors varied from school to school, from trust to trust, and across different areas, and governors and possibly heads in multi-academy trusts had tended to feel better supported by the trust in their decisions than schools that had not been in a MAT. There had been much variation in which decisions had been delegated to academy level and some governors had relied on informal networks of schools where support was not available.

***“In responding to the pandemic, governors said that their priorities had been catching up on missed learning and children’s mental health and well-being.”***

Responding to the pandemic, governors said that their priorities had been catching up on missed learning and children’s mental health and well-being. Governors felt confident that they would be able to monitor pupil progress and hold heads to account without exam data from September, they warned about longer-term challenges in monitoring the progress of pupils who had fallen behind while not in school, and who had not already been identified as being in need before schools closed.

The sudden introduction of remote and online learning had raised concerns for several governors about equal access to online technologies and the quality of remote learning. Schools had been at different stages in establishing online remote education, but governors had suggested that greater oversight of the quality of the learning and pupil access would be vital.

Some governors and trustees had been concerned about how long it would take for pupils to catch up and the long-term impact of school closure on different groups of children. Many had been reconsidering their strategic plans to take the impact of school closures into account and most governors and trustees felt that adjustments, including changes to the curriculum, would need to be made over the next academic year.



# Invest in digital technology to support FE colleges and learners

**N**ew research into the impact on the further education sector of the recently enforced shift to remote learning has highlighted key problem areas for staff and learners that will need urgent attention and investment. The first report of a research project led by Jisc, in partnership with the Association of Colleges, pointed out that there were big differences in colleges' capability and approach to delivering education online, as there was no standardised approach, a lack of digital resources and a pressing need to improve staff digital skills.

The report also warned that disadvantaged learners who had limited access to devices and adequate broadband connections had been struggling disproportionately and they needed more support. The research project had been based on findings from a series of webinars and roundtables that had been held during the summer with teachers, learners, edtech experts, sector bodies and college leaders. The project, shaping the digital future of FE and skills, aimed to establish a consensus on what "good" would look like for learners and staff who were working remotely, share knowledge ahead of the autumn term, and realise the potential of technology to benefit the FE and skills sector.

Jisc's managing director of FE and skills, Robin Ghurbhurun, said that while a few colleges had years of online teaching experience using a wide range of technology, most were not digitally-advanced organisations, but they had risen to the pandemic challenge as best they could by switching lessons to platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, which was not a sustainable model.

He said that lockdown had also exacerbated the digital divide, as some colleges had been posting laptops to learners who did not have one, but even if there was a device at home, it may be shared among the whole family. Mr Ghurbhurun added that families on lower incomes had been struggling to afford decent broadband packages. He pointed out that other challenges included a lack of affordable and accessible digital resources and assessment tools, which meant that courses such as engineering, construction, or hospitality and catering were impossible to deliver entirely online.

Recommendations from the report included that the Government should:

- Fund a centralised FE and skills digital content search and discovery platform and the creation of content for the platform.
- Provide access to funding for digital devices and connectivity so no learner was disadvantaged.
- Adapt assessment methodology to fit digital pedagogy.

# Managing COVID-19 transmission in further education

*Principles for Managing SARS-CoV-2 Transmission Associated with Further Education*, the Task and Finish Group on Higher Education/Further Education, considered by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) at its 55th meeting on COVID-19 on 3 September 2020 and published on 4 September 2020. This is a report on that paper, the full contents of which can be found and downloaded at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-for-managing-sars-cov-2-transmission-associated-with-further-education-3-september-2020>

**E**arlier this month SAGE considered and then published a paper on managing the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus associated with further education (FE). With staff and students having returned to college this month (or last month in Scotland), the DfE and the devolved institutions have issued guidance for colleges. This paper is provided in the context of existing guidance and FE sector plans and aims to supplement these by summarising the latest evidence relating to transmission associated with the resumption of FE activities, particularly the return of students to all FE and other related settings such as workplaces.

It specifically considers how to manage transmission in the wider context of local and national interactions and brings together up-to-date evidence and advice in a set of specific principles, with the following question: “What principles can minimise the impact of the return of FE on local and national outbreaks, taking into account the wider impacts and interactions highlighted above?”

## **Key considerations - connectivity**

FE creates connectivity between multiple organisations and could amplify local transmission. It is highly likely that there will be outbreaks associated with FE, and asymptomatic transmission may make these harder to detect. Outbreak response needs local plans to be developed in collaboration between FE providers, local public health teams and any relevant work placement providers.

All FE providers should expect to have cases of COVID-19 and it is highly likely that some FE providers, local health agencies and the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) will have to manage the consequences of a more significant outbreak either directly associated with their setting (courses or work placements) or within their local community or region (high confidence).

There is no strong evidence that those in FE demographics in general play a smaller role in transmission than adults in the general population (medium confidence). Evidence suggests there are a higher proportion of asymptomatic cases among younger age groups, meaning that cases and outbreaks are likely to be harder to detect among some FE student populations (high confidence).

Monitoring of such risks and any decision making can be carried out between local public health teams in collaboration with the FE providers and where necessary NIHP. Outbreak response needs local plans to be developed in collaboration between FE providers, local public health teams and any relevant work placement providers. These need to define actions and responsibilities across the range of eventualities including a clear approach for how data on cases and outbreaks should be reported, and how this information is communicated between FE organisations and public health teams.

Plans should aim to minimise ongoing transmission while limiting the need for widescale closure of FE settings/sites, and need to consider this highly complex system including households, transport and the interfaces with workplaces rather than just the FE setting in isolation. As part of this it is important that there is a clear plan for communicating with staff, students and the local community during outbreaks.

## **Key considerations – testing, tracing and isolation**

It is essential to develop clear strategies for testing, tracing and isolation. A critical control against transmission is that people with symptoms isolate, are tested and engage with contact tracing. As such a

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national strategy defining key principles for testing in FE should be developed that can be adapted and implemented locally. This should be complementary to and part of NHS Test and Trace (NHSTT). This should cover enabling students and staff to easily access testing, communication about when to get a test, support for people required to isolate if the result is positive, and guidance on recording and reporting information to facilitate contact tracing. Evidence suggests there are a higher proportion of asymptomatic cases among younger age groups, meaning that cases and outbreaks are likely to be harder to detect among some student populations (high confidence).

Wider scale testing combined with appropriate action plans are likely to be beneficial in controlling outbreaks associated with FE. FE settings are good locations to pilot both mass testing / population case detection (PCD) and contact tracing approaches; studies that assess the effectiveness of these surveillance approaches should be carried out. Enhanced testing (beyond immediate contacts) in response to a suspected outbreak is likely to be beneficial in detecting and preventing ongoing transmission, but may require frequent testing, as well as follow up confirmatory testing to reduce the number of false positives asked to isolate incorrectly. Evidence suggests one-off PCD could have some impact on containment where people are arriving from areas of higher prevalence but limited longer term impact on outbreaks – and as such may be limited in FE settings where students/staff are often local (medium confidence). The prevalence at which any PCD approach should be introduced/stopped needs to be carefully considered.

### **Key considerations – a hierarchy of risk**

Safe provision of education needs to be based on a hierarchy of risk. A layered, flexible approach should be taken to managing transmission risks that considers a hierarchy of risk, the different modes of transmission, the duration of exposure and the vulnerability of the people concerned.

The risk management strategy must consider the learning outcomes of courses and student and staff wellbeing, alongside the transmission risks associated with different activities and the risk of amplifying transmission in the community, to determine the appropriate balance of online and in-person interaction. This will vary between courses depending on the activity and the demographics of the staff and students and will vary during term as prevalence changes.

There is strong evidence that reducing in-person interaction is an effective way to limit transmission and so delivery of activities online, especially for larger groups, is a key mitigation (high confidence). However, remote learning is not feasible for many FE courses which rely on practical training and hands on learning, and hence adapting these courses in a COVID-secure way is essential. Providers should consider risks to both staff and students, and the potential risks for transmission in the community when making decisions.

Segmenting of student/staff populations (e.g. by course, year group, site, etc) should be designed to support easier detection of linked cases and, if necessary, enable more targeted closure/quarantine. Segmenting will be more effective if there are fewer contacts outside the group. It is important to consider that staff or those in workplace settings may inadvertently connect segments (high confidence).

Principles for managing transmission risk and the evidence for mitigation measures have been set out previously and should address aerosol, droplet and surface transmission. Super spreading outbreaks are associated with crowded indoor spaces (high confidence) and there is growing evidence that aerosol transmission may be an important transmission route (medium confidence). Particular attention should be given to ventilation provision alongside plans for managing social distancing; together these are likely to constrain the occupancy of physical spaces for educational activities.

Face coverings are an important mitigation against droplet and aerosol transmission in shared indoor spaces especially where social distancing is difficult to maintain, or ventilation is poor (medium confidence). Some FE courses including those with close contact training elements (such as hair and beauty, healthcare related), significant handling of tools or materials (such as workshop-based courses) or interactions through theatre/musical performance may pose additional risks (medium confidence) and increased consideration of PPE/face coverings, enhanced ventilation or cleaning is needed.

*(Continued on page 24.)*

### **Key considerations – physical and mental health**

There need to be specific strategies to consider the wider physical and mental health of students and staff beyond COVID-19. Whilst younger FE students are likely to have less severe COVID-19 (high confidence), this is not true for many students and staff, and there is no strong evidence that those in FE demographics in general play a smaller role in transmission than adults in the general population (medium confidence). FE settings have a significant number of staff and students who may be more vulnerable to severe consequences of COVID-19, and this will vary between organisations.

There is likely to be co-infection with other viruses including influenza over winter (high confidence). Maximising the flu vaccination programme to protect at-risk groups in FE settings will be important, as will approaches to distinguish between respiratory viruses (e.g. multiplex testing).

There is evidence of physical and mental health impacts from missing or limited access to education and from reduced social interaction and support that can arise from remote learning. Although direct evidence in FE is more limited than in schools, survey evidence related to COVID-19 indicates disruption to research and learning, lower wellbeing and increased mental distress (low confidence). Further restrictions and short-term actions such as isolation in response to test and trace may impact anxiety. It is important that provision is made to support mental and physical health of staff and students beyond COVID-19.

### **Key considerations – the importance of communications**

Communication strategies are a critical part of minimising transmission risks associated with FE. Current guidance is complex, and many people are unclear as to what the current rules are (medium confidence). Guidance differs across the four nations of the UK. As education providers, FE institutions are in a good position to help staff and students understand not just what ‘the rules’ are that apply to their own institution, but, more importantly, the principles that underlie these rules. This will provide better motivation for people to adhere to them and enable them to adapt their behaviour to FE settings (medium confidence). Providing education as to how COVID-19 spreads, and how to reduce the risk, should underpin guidance and be an important induction activity.

Guidance on how to behave is more likely to be adhered to if it is co-produced with the staff and students who will be affected by it. This also reduces the risk of unexpected problems or tensions arising in implementation (medium/high confidence). Co-production is not costly or time-consuming and FE providers should seek to involve a diverse range of staff and students in developing and refining guidance and communications. Guidance should promote the salience of the group’s identity, promote safe behaviours as one of the norms of the group, and ensure that student organisations lead in promoting COVID safety. Policies and messages should take into account the diversity of social and cultural backgrounds of students and staff. Obtaining maximum support and adherence will require that messages are tested with people from different backgrounds to ensure that wording and concepts are understood, reinforced by people who are trusted, take into account the issues that people from different cultures may face (e.g. religious observances, typical living arrangements), and are sensitive to pre-existing attitudes towards health promotion and health communication (high confidence).

Disagreements, mistakes and transgressions will happen. Preventing anger, confrontation and stigmatisation will be important. Students and staff should be encouraged to adopt a supportive attitude, while engagement, explanation and encouragement should be considered for transgressions as well as enforcement. Consistency in messaging and guidance should be sought across departments and sites, and partner organisations, in order to reduce confusion and promote confidence. Where different rules are in place in different settings, this should ideally be explained. Apparent inconsistencies between institutions may also be problematic in reducing trust – there should be communication between neighbouring institutions or institutions that share courses or facilities.

### **Evidence based principles**

Further Education settings are not homogenous and have different demographics, patterns of activity and



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environments. FE plays an important role in society, directly providing substantial numbers of jobs and supporting economic and knowledge development through training and other activities. Many elements of FE can successfully be delivered remotely, however there are risks in some areas that require elements face-to-face training. As well as risks related to COVID-19, there may be negative impacts to students and business if access to education is limited which may disproportionately disadvantage vulnerable or marginalised students.

Further Education settings share some features and demographics with both schools and workplaces, with some differences: whilst a large proportion of students are aged 16-18, a significant number of students and staff are older than 50; nearly 25% of students are from a BAME background and >50% of adult students are from the bottom two Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles; students are also likely to attend workplaces as part of study or otherwise; FE students are more reliant on public transport. DfE indicate 20% of FE students self-report having a learning difficulty and/or disability.

### **Amplification of transmission and outbreak response**

Public Health England (PHE) data in England from 1 June to 18 August 2020 indicates that there were 69 confirmed clusters or outbreaks in educational settings, of which 7 were in secondary age groups and 7 in 'mixed' age groups. In workplace settings, there were 236 confirmed clusters/outbreaks between 29 June and 16 August. It is not clear if any, or how many, of these were FE settings or workplaces with links to FE. PHE find that outbreaks in all educational settings were uncommon in June and were strongly correlated with regional SARS-CoV-2 incidence. Staff members had an increased risk of SARS-CoV-2 infections in any educational setting with the majority of outbreaks linked to staff. (1)

Asymptomatic transmission is a key risk in FE settings. Current SAGE advice on asymptomatic infection indicates uncertainty remains and that between 30-80% (2) of all infections could be asymptomatic. This may vary by circumstance. NERVTAG are due to review this shortly. The proportion of infections that are asymptomatic may also vary with age, with more asymptomatic infections in younger age groups. For example, one large contact tracing study found 18.1% (95%CI, 13.9-22.9%) of infected people under 20 developed symptoms vs 64.6% (95%CI, 56.6-72%) of those over 80. (3)

SAGE has previously noted that individuals likely to facilitate super-spreading events may be asymptomatic or paucisymptomatic, however studies of cluster tracing internationally did not identify schools or colleges as centres of these events. There is medium confidence in this as national and international closures have meant there has been little opportunity for transmission, but the high numbers of cases linked to e.g. US universities suggest asymptomatic transmission is significant.

### **Increased cases and outbreaks in FE could amplify local transmission of the virus**

FE staff and students create a large network (2.6% of UK population). There is significant complexity and variety within FE settings and they may link multiple households and workplaces to educational settings, akin to schools. (4) Some FE settings will be significantly more networked than others. Many FE students attend multiple sites, are present at educational and workplace settings (e.g. in apprenticeships) or have part-time jobs. A significant number of FE staff work at multiple sites and providers.

The FE sector is not a homogenous group, and different FE settings should be considered individually – variation in demographics, course structures, network interactions and other factors have different implications for risk. For instance:

- Some FE settings or learning types, such as sixth-form colleges or traineeships, are likely to have primarily young adult students. Others will have a much higher proportion of older, more vulnerable students.
- The frequency and nature of contacts will also differ across FE settings and learning types. This will partly reflect the demographics, with the number and clustering of social contacts differing by age, but also due to the different activities in place. Some FE courses will have an employment component to the course, and/or with extensive off-site training; some vocational courses may be in higher risk occupations such as

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hairdressing or social care.

- It is also important to bear in mind that a substantial proportion of FE courses are part-time; unlike schools, it will not necessarily be the case that households/education settings are the main source of contacts for students.

As such, the relevance of past advice will differ across settings and learning types. For example: sixth form colleges are relatively similar to older years in secondary schools, so previous advice or analysis on secondary schools may be helpful. In contrast, apprenticeships and traineeships will need to draw on both advice for schools and workplaces, including any occupation-specific advice.

Compared to Higher Education, networks related to FE settings are more likely to be localised and involve less migration across the country and internationally. As such, the impact of transmission risks may be more likely to have local or regional rather than national impact. We do not have specific modelling on transmission associated with FE settings, although some insight can be gained from models that consider schools and highly networked communities. (5) This suggests that the main influence of FE will be to increase contact rates within a community and hence amplify transmission at a local scale. Consequently, an outbreak in an FE site is more likely to threaten locally than nationally.

### **Testing, tracing and isolation (TTI)**

It is important that testing plans in FE settings are complementary and linked-up with NHSTT. TTI plans in FE settings should explicitly consider interactions with other mitigations, student and staff welfare and behaviour, and vulnerable groups. Accurate and effective testing and contact tracing across all relevant settings, including linked workplaces will be vital. This includes the coverage of/engagement with the system, testing strategies, and adherence to measures such as quarantine.

SAGE has repeatedly outlined evidence on the importance of testing and tracing approaches, including that an effective test and trace system ideally covers 80% of contacts (6) and the importance of cluster tracing including backwards contact tracing.(7) Current evidence suggests it is premature to use antibody testing to support e.g. ‘immunity passports’. (8) SAGE have also emphasised the importance of engagement with the test and trace system, including effective communications and transparency. (9) Improving adherence should be a principal target. (10) The predictive value of any testing approach will substantially depend on prevalence, sensitivity and specificity, with a high specificity test necessary to minimise false positive rates. (11)

A national plan for testing and isolation must be developed that can be adapted and implemented locally. Current evidence from the general community suggests that uptake of testing among people who have cough, fever or anosmia is low. Estimates range from 12% (among people with symptoms responding to polls) to 35% (derived by dividing the number of cases identified per day in pillar two by NHS Test and Trace by the daily incidence estimated by the Office for National Statistics). (12). Staff and students must be encouraged and supported to obtain a test. This will require them to:

- a) Understand the symptoms that should trigger a test (current recognition is 60%) (13);
- b) Understand that a test must be requested for even mild symptoms, and that a “wait and see” approach is not acceptable (14);
- c) Have very easy access to a test facility, given that lack of transport will be a major barrier and be assured that accessing a test and receiving the result is straightforward and hassle-free. (14)
- d) Be assured that any perceived negative consequences to requesting a test will be dealt with, without hassle. If staff or students feel that the result of a test may have a negative impact on their studies, pay, workload, peers or colleagues, this will be a disincentive to request a test or to reveal their symptoms; (15)
- e) Be able to effectively isolate.

For a given capacity of testing, careful consideration should be given to the approach that will be most beneficial. The SAGE Task and Finish Group on Mass Testing (TFMS) has advised that ‘population case

detection' (PCD) – testing of regular and/or large-scale testing of defined populations regardless of if they have symptoms, should be carefully considered alongside the benefit of investing equivalent resources into the speed and coverage of testing symptomatic cases and contacts through NHSTT and/or improving adherence to isolation. (16) Similarly, a high prevalence of general respiratory symptoms, such as related to influenza in winter, could significantly increase testing demand and may require approaches such as multiplex testing. (17) PCD in populations with low prevalence that does not use an extremely high specificity test could result in a higher number of false positive than true positive individuals required to isolate – something that could be mitigated with further rapid confirmatory testing.

One-off PCD is not likely to have significant benefits in FE settings where staff and students are local. One-off PCD before a long-duration activity such as the start of term may not provide much benefit in preventing outbreaks but could have some impact on containment where students are arriving from areas of higher prevalence. If students and staff come from the local area this approach is likely to be less beneficial than a scenario where students are e.g. arriving to higher education settings from areas of much higher prevalence. For preventing outbreaks in general, the potential for repeated introductions means that even high sensitivity one-off testing will have limited impact. Testing incoming students for containment is equivalent to testing international travel arrivals, and pre- or post-arrival quarantine could be as effective, if adhered to.

Regular PCD is most likely to be beneficial and feasible in cluster outbreak scenarios and well-defined higher-risk settings. The background prevalence, aim, and actions triggered by positive results need to be carefully considered. Whilst the TFMS group identified universities as potential high-risk settings, schools were identified as lower risk. As noted above, FE settings and demographics are not homogenous and could differ widely here. Differences in background prevalence, environments, links to workplaces, behaviour and the mitigations in place, among others, will all have an impact on the level of risk in specific FE populations. To have confidence in early detection of a large proportion of infectious individuals would require frequent testing and fast turn-around times; for example one modelling study estimated that for current estimates of PCR test sensitivity, weekly screening of healthcare workers and a 24 hour delay from testing to isolation could reduce their contribution to transmission by 23% on top of self-isolation following symptoms. (18) Lower test sensitivity and/or frequency of testing would reduce the effectiveness of these approaches.

The prevalence at which any PCD approach is introduced and ceased, as well as the impact of test specificity on false positives, needs to be carefully considered. Particularly for lower-risk FE populations and settings, a large number of individuals may be required to isolate incorrectly with PCD – very high test specificity and/or confirmatory testing could reduce this number.

Any potential enhanced or mass testing approaches should be informed by emerging research and pilots and consider the best timing and approach for specific outcomes. However, FE settings may provide the kind of well-defined institutional settings where mass testing may be more likely to be effective in detecting outbreaks quickly.

Both HE and FE settings are good locations to test the potential for enhanced testing strategies and technologies, and research pilots to explore effectiveness are taking place in a number of UK universities. Similarly, FE settings may be good testbeds to explore the effectiveness of other approaches such as contact tracing apps. Where universities carry out their own testing, it is important that results are shared with NHSTT. Enhanced regular testing may also be appropriate for students and staff associated with high risk courses, for example hair and beauty or healthcare courses involving close contacts or workplaces which are associated with cases.

Outbreak responses: contact tracing and PCD. It is important to ensure effective mechanisms to enable contact tracing, and to pay particular attention to those spaces where mechanisms are not already in place to record this information such as shared study spaces or computer clusters. Enhanced testing in response to cases may be an appropriate strategy when contact tracing is challenging or there is concern over wider transmission. This could for example include testing a whole course year group or department in

response to cases. Such a strategy needs to have clearly defined outcomes and consideration of frequency of repetition and should not replace symptomatic testing and contact tracing.

Testing must be supported by appropriate planning and support for students and staff quarantining. In particular, the implications of testing for numbers in isolation or quarantine and how institutions plan to effectively accommodate this should be part of the decision-making. For example: if there is no segmentation of students in place, SPI-M work on universities indicates that relatively few infections could result in the majority of an organisation needing to isolate/quarantine, although it is not clear if this directly applies to FE. The optimal testing strategy will depend on adherence to isolation; this in turn is influenced by the support in place.

Among people reporting symptoms of COVID-19 in England, self-reported adherence to isolation is low, (19) and self-reported ability to self-isolate is three times lower in those with incomes less than £20,000 or savings less than £100. (20) This is likely to affect many staff contracted from private companies including cleaning, catering and security staff, and may be particularly relevant for students who rely on part-time employment to support themselves. There is minimal evidence on the extent to which students comply with self-isolation for COVID-19, but analysis of a large US influenza outbreak (21) showed compliance with isolation was very poor with over 93% of students reporting leaving their accommodation before the recommended seven days, and 50% leaving daily. A large proportion were concerned over missing classes, while others were going out for food/medicine, or just felt OK or wanted to go out. 44.7% reported attending social activities before 7 days had passed, and 35.9% had visitors while they were still sick. Nearly half left campus for >1 day while sick (44.9%) including going to parents or friends' homes. It is likely that those who are not in self-contained accommodation will find it more challenging to comply. Among people with symptoms in the general community, 75% report having left the home in the past 24 hours. (22)

### **Managing Environmental Transmission**

Principles for managing transmission risk and evidence for multiple mitigation strategies have been set out in previous papers and indicate that there is evidence for three modes of transmission (aerosol, close range droplet, surfaces). Duration of exposure is important with transmission more likely in spaces where people spend a long period of time with others (e.g. classrooms, offices, labs, workshops, staff room) rather than spaces where there is a very short duration of interaction (e.g. passing in the corridor or on the staircase).

Aerosol transmission may be a significant mode of transmission especially for super spreading events which lead to multiple secondary cases. (23) The environment in many FE buildings is conducive to aerosol transmission with poorly ventilated classroom or office spaces posing a particular risk. There is evidence to support enhanced risk associated with certain activities:

- There is emerging evidence that loud singing and speech can generate more aerosols and so could enhance risks, which may pose challenges for performing arts courses as well as loud speech during lecturing and presentations. Mitigation measures will include 2m distancing, face coverings for those not performing, ensuring spaces have enhanced ventilation, restricting sizes of groups and duration of activities and using microphones. (24)
- There is evidence of higher transmission with enhanced aerobic activity. (25) Sports based courses should ensure distancing and good ventilation.

Ventilation should be given a similar weighting to other control measures. There is evidence from several settings that low ventilation rates are associated with higher transmission rates. (26)

### **Face coverings**

Face coverings are an important mitigation. They act as a source control and provide some protection to the wearer. There is good evidence for their effectiveness in preventing droplets from being released by an infected person and some evidence they can reduce the exposure of someone else to those droplets. They



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may also limit aerosol transmission by capturing droplets at the source and hence preventing them evaporating into smaller aerosols that can remain suspended in air. (27)

Their use will therefore have the greatest benefits in scenarios where:

- (i) people have to come into close proximity, even for a short period of time, and hence could be exposed to higher concentrations of aerosols and droplets close to an infected person, and
- (ii) people are in the same shared space for a period of time and breathing the same air, particularly if the space is poorly ventilated or there is activity that could produce enhanced aerosols.

Vocational training involving very close contact with other people (e.g. hair and beauty) may pose specific risks. There is some evidence that face coverings can prevent transmission (28) and hence PPE (masks & face shields) and specific protocols to protect both the student and the person treated are necessary. Course providers should consider using approaches such as dummy heads etc for training but ensure these are well cleaned.

The advice below reflects the relatively low community prevalence at the time of writing; if cases increase within a community or for particular FE bodies it would be appropriate to consider further extending the use of face coverings to a greater range of shared indoor spaces.

Face coverings are most likely to be beneficial as part of a risk mitigation strategy in the following cases:

- During educational activities that require close contact with another person as part of the training (e.g. elements of hair/beauty, health and care or similar courses). It is appropriate for students and staff to follow the equivalent PPE requirements in the relevant professional setting.
- When in indoor communal, laboratory, office, classroom or workshop areas where social distancing is difficult or good ventilation is difficult to provide. This is particularly important in situations where contact tracing may be difficult and where groups of students regularly interact with different groups (e.g. through work placements).
- In indoor settings which could involve enhanced aerosol production, for example through physical exertion, loud speech (presentations, drama production) or singing. Listeners/observers should wear face coverings as well as maintain social distance from the speaker/singers.
- Wider use may also be beneficial in other settings where the wearing of the face covering doesn't interfere excessively with the activity (e.g. in a seminar, tutorial, laboratory practical etc.), particularly if there is an increase in cases of infection among the FE body or higher prevalence in the local community.

FE settings should ensure that staff and students are prompted about key behaviours at important moments, are able to perform them, and that environments are redesigned to promote safer behaviour. For example, placing reminders about the need to clean hands and facilities (e.g. sanitizer) for doing so at site entrances<sup>53</sup>; creating one-way systems to reduce face-to-face interactions. Courses involving interaction with tools and objects such as those in workshops/design studios could present a higher surface transmission risk, so cleaning protocols for shared areas and equipment combined with good hygiene training/messaging is important.

### **Communication strategy**

A communication strategy should help to prepare staff and students for new behaviours that are required of them, as well as provide an accurate account of the level of risk involved and the processes that are in place to mitigate risk. This should cover what the official guidelines are and how they are being applied in the FE context; explain the rationale for the guidance, and why adherence is important both for staff and students and for keeping the FE setting open. Guidance should be co-created with staff and students and should support the creation of new social norms. The communication itself should be done by a range of people – including students.

Consider the range of cultural backgrounds when developing communications and plans. FE

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institutions include staff and students from a wide range of communities within the UK. It is essential, therefore, that policies and messages take this into account. Obtaining maximum support and adherence from the FE community will require that messages are tested with staff and students from different backgrounds to ensure that wording and concepts are understood, reinforced by people who are trusted, take into account the issues that people from different cultures may face (e.g. religious observances, typical living arrangements), and are sensitive to pre-existing attitudes towards health promotion and health communication. FE providers should make an effort to engage a diverse, representative groups of students to support the above activities, e.g. when developing student contracts/agreements, the rationale for protective measures draws on relevant norms (global – identity; specific – interdependent collective norms), role models, mental health support seeking barriers. (29)

## Foot notes

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- (4) <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.08.21.20167965v1>
- (5) See e.g. SPI-M-O: comments on schools and universities; presented to SAGE 9 July 2020.
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# SARS-CoV-2 susceptibility and transmission risk in children

*SARS-CoV2 susceptibility and transmission risk in children: an overview of current evidence from Public Health England's surveillance work*, a paper prepared by Public Health England (PHE) for the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and considered by SAGE at its 53rd meeting on COVID-19 on 27 August 2020. Published on Friday 11 September 2020. This is a report on the paper and does not include its three appendices. These and the full report can be accessed at

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-sars-cov2-susceptibility-and-transmission-risk-in-children-an-overview-of-current-evidence-from-phe-surveillance-work-19-august-2020?utm\\_source=cbf3a81c-e288-4217-a546-c59d9c7b59f2&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-sars-cov2-susceptibility-and-transmission-risk-in-children-an-overview-of-current-evidence-from-phe-surveillance-work-19-august-2020?utm_source=cbf3a81c-e288-4217-a546-c59d9c7b59f2&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

**T**his paper summarises evidence on what is known about susceptibility to infection and transmission dynamics in children. It briefly references evidence from the international literature but draws primarily on information from a range of surveillance systems and studies initiated by Public Health England (PHE) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of the paper is on implications of findings for educational settings in England.

The paper begins with an overview of overarching evidence on exposure rates and susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 in children before turning to address, in turn, evidence on transmission risk to and from children and young people in (i) households and the community; and (ii) educational settings. The focus of this paper is on children and young people, up to the ages of 16-19 years depending on the country source of the report. It does not consider evidence relating to young people of university age.

The paper has been produced as an evidence update for members of NERVTAG.

## Overall risk of SARS-CoV2 infection and COVID-19 in children

Children are less likely to be hospitalised, need intensive care admission or die from COVID-19 compared to adults and, particularly, older adults [1,2]. The difference is particularly evident in children younger than 10 years compared to those aged 10-19 years [1]. A small proportion of children may develop severe disease with features of severe Kawasaki- and Toxic Shock Syndrome, but the relationship between this new clinical syndrome and SARS-CoV-2 infection remains unclear [3,4].

Population-level seroprevalence studies help give an indication of the extent of exposure to SARS-CoV-2, and rates of infection, among children. Two PHE-led studies offer insights in this regard, covering the period 1 February to 2 August 2020:

- a. The PHE Seroepidemiology Unit (SEU) and paediatric hospital survey: a collection of residual serum samples from routine microbiological testing;
- b. *What's the Story*: a representative household survey that collects sera from healthy children and adolescents under the age of 25 years in England.

Both these analyses showed initially very low seroprevalence rates among children (0.5-0.8% depending on the study) in February-March, rising to a peak in April (in the range of 3.8-6.1% depending on the study) before declining in May (see Appendix 1, not included here) – mirroring the longitudinal picture seen in adults. *What's the Story* data indicate an uplift in prevalence in the June-August period although confidence intervals overlap with previous periods.

The SEU seroprevalence data demonstrate a small but non-significant increase in antibody positivity rates from children to adults but with wide confidence intervals because of small sample sizes. (a) Preliminary data from schools surveillance (the sKIDs study – see further detail below) also show similar seropositivity rates among staff and students. Nationally, Office for National Statistics data suggest no difference in infection rates in children compared with adults, but this assessment is based on PCR

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positivity rather than serology data [5].

### **Susceptibility to COVID-19 in children compared to adults**

A meta-analysis of international contact-tracing studies – almost all of which originated from China – published in May 2020 found that children had a substantially lower (56%) odds of being an infected contact compared with adults [6]. However, the case definition in all of these studies was based on RT-PCR positivity, not serological testing, limiting conclusions that can be drawn about odds of secondary infection in children from these data. Data published in a recent, large modelling study using data from China, Italy, Japan, Singapore, Canada and South Korea found that susceptibility to infection in people aged under 20 was around half of those aged 20 and over [7].

Taken together, these data suggest that (i) seroprevalence rates in children are slightly lower than in older age groups (possibly explained by lower rates of exposure among children during lockdown, although clear inferences are limited by overlapping confidence intervals); and (ii) children may be less likely to develop symptomatic infection compared to adults.

### **Transmission to and from children in households and the community**

International data from community-based studies in Ireland [8] and France [9] (the latter study carried out in an area of high background transmission) spanning all contact between participants, show limited evidence of child-child and child-adult transmission, despite similar viral infection/load in children when compared with adults [10].

Available evidence suggests children often acquire infection from others in household settings [for example, 11]. Important data in this regard come from RAPID-19, a study conducted by PHE with collaborators from across the UK, which recruited children of 215 health professionals in England to evaluate transmission from these workers to household members. In this study, 12% of children of healthcare workers tested COVID-19 positive overall, varying between 2% of children of PHE staff to 17% of children of NHS clinical staff (including GPs). The observed attack rate in children of NHS clinical staff with confirmed COVID-19 was 40%, with evidence of clustering of seropositivity within families – i.e. if one child in family is positive, then nearly all children are positive in the family. In the remaining families, if one child was seronegative, then all children were seronegative [12].

Children can however transmit to other children and to adults, especially those aged 10 and over within the household setting, once they have acquired infection. A household contact tracing exercise of nearly 60,000 contacts in South Korea found that in instances where the index case was aged 10-19 (b), the percentage of positive household contacts identified was 18.6% (14.0-24.0), higher than any other single age group in the study, although the proportion of outside-household contacts testing positive was comparatively low [13].

PHE data also confirm that children can transmit infection within a household setting. Data come from two sources:

- a. The FF100 study, following up the first few hundred cases of COVID-19 in the UK and their household contacts (amounting to 667 individuals residing in 213 homes);
- b. Enhanced Surveillance of Household Contacts (HoCo) – an extension to FF100 focused on households of confirmed index cases; and

In FF100, based on probable and PCR-confirmed cases, modelled secondary attack rates indicated that people living in households where the primary case was aged under 19 had a risk of acquiring the infection that was more than 6 times greater than households where the initial cases were aged 19-64 (see appendix 2, not included here). These findings suggest that children may transmit SARS-CoV-2 more efficiently than adults in a household setting, (though there were only five households with a child as a primary case).

In the HoCo study, secondary infection rates (based on serology and PCR) among contacts who were children were similar to those in adults (see appendix 3). Households with children as index cases were recruited later in the study, and most are still awaiting serology data.

Taken together, findings from these studies suggest that transmission risk to and from children in household settings is significant, but that observed infection rates are greatest in household contexts where the probability of exposure is high (children of clinical workers, for examples).

### **Transmission to and from children in educational settings**

Evidence from schools and other educational settings indicates low risk of transmission in children of nursery or primary school age. There is insufficient evidence yet available to give a clear picture of risk for children of secondary school age. It nevertheless appears that risk accrues mainly to staff in these settings.

A PHE-led rapid review of transmission of COVID-19 in school settings and interventions to reduce the transmission produced in July 2020 considered evidence from the international literature on this topic [14]. The review identified three epidemiological case series published from 1 January 2020 to 18 June 2020, from Australia, France and Ireland [15,16,17]. All three studies considered onward transmission among children who were contacts of primary cases.

Significant limitations in data completeness do not permit secondary attack rates to be calculated but reported secondary case numbers in these studies were very low (range:  $n=1-2$ ). Two of the three studies examined whether child-to-teacher transmission occurred in their focus setting and found no evidence that it had [15,16].

Literature findings are broadly supported by primary data on transmission in educational settings available to PHE, and which derive from two sources:

- a. The COVID-19 Surveillance in KIDs (sKID) study, launched in May 2020; and
- b. Secondary analysis of reports to PHE Health Protection Teams (HPTs) of possible or confirmed outbreaks linked to educational settings in England.

In evaluating this evidence, it is important to consider the global context of service provision in the education sector during the pandemic. Data from the Department for Education (DfE) show that estimated attendance across all year groups from nursery through to year 12 rose from 475,000 on 01/06/2020 to 1,608,000 on 09/07/2020 [18]. Over the same period, the estimated number of open educational settings rose from 20,500 to 22,700 (c). By comparison, school census data gathered by the Office for National Statistics in 2019/20 report an attendance headcount of 8,890,357 in England that year, spanning settings of all types, and show that 24,360 school settings were open over that year [19].

The sKID study has so far recruited 9,000 participants (both children and staff members) across 138 schools in England. In 49 of these schools, swab tests and blood tests have been offered to participants at the beginning and end of term. In the remaining 89 schools, weekly COVID-19 swab tests have been performed. Of more than 30,000 swab tests so far performed via these routes for those participating in this study, 6 have returned positive results. Five of the six individuals with positive results were staff members for whom there is no evidence that infection was acquired within the school. The sole positive test in a child occurred in a household where the mother (a healthcare worker) had previously tested positive.

Data on confirmed clusters and outbreaks of COVID-19 cases in educational settings (d) in England have also been collated by PHE (see appended paper for further details of the approach used), and detailed further investigation is underway for all these situations to build a complete picture. For June, the month for which data are currently most complete, 170 situations were reported in total, in 69 (40%) of which there were ultimately no confirmed cases, there was a single confirmed case in 67 (39%), a confirmed cluster of co-primary cases (within the same household in 4 (2%) and a confirmed outbreak (defined as two or more confirmed cases within a 14 day period linked to the setting) in 30 (18%).

In the confirmed clusters (i.e. co-primary cases occurring in the same household), the index case acquired the infection from a known source outside the educational setting, and the source identified in all of these instances was another household member (parents in 4 of the 5 households involved). Children in these situations were tested as part of wider household testing for confirmed cases.

For the 30 situations that were confirmed as outbreaks, 15 concerned transmission between staff

members with no evidence of transmission to children. Seven outbreaks involved evidence of transmission from staff members to children. In six outbreaks there was evidence suggesting transmission from a child to a staff member (never more than one staff member was affected however, in any given outbreak where transmission from a child was thought to have occurred as the primary event). Two outbreaks involved potential child-child transmission. Two of the outbreaks occurred in secondary schools, both involving staff-staff transmission only. There were also differences in patterns of secondary spread from index cases: where the index case was a child, the maximum number of secondary cases for any outbreak across the month was two (compared with nine for staff members).

Analysis against pillar 2 testing data identified a strong correlation between number of outbreaks in educational settings and regional COVID-19 incidence (0.51 outbreaks for each new SARS-CoV-2 infection per 100,000 in the community;  $p=0.001$ ). We estimate that there were 0.5, 4.8 and 1.6 outbreaks per 1,000 settings per month in early years, primary schools and secondary schools over the month of June – although it should be noted that attendance levels across open settings were much higher for early years and primary schools than secondary schools.

Finally, emerging evidence from qualitative research work as part of the sKID study offers insights on the practical feasibility of implementing COVID-19 protective measures in schools. In particular, this work points to the challenges of maintaining social distancing measures in educational settings for children in this age group, and the perceived value of basic infection prevention and control measures including hand washing.

## **Summary**

Available evidence from PHE surveillance systems show that children are almost as likely to get infected with SARS-CoV2 as adults, as observed through their antibody status. Given that there are nearly half as many confirmed COVID-19 cases in children up to 10 years compared to adults, it is likely that most infections are asymptomatic or mild and transient but with sufficient exposure to mount an antibody response.

In younger children, most infections are likely to be acquired in household settings. There is little evidence that they transmit more widely, even in educational settings, suggesting that closer, intimate contact is required for transmission from children to other children and adults to occur. This would suggest that children in bubbles and classes are at relatively low risk and that the highest risk is among staff members.

There is insufficient data from PHE systems currently to form a clear view of acquisition and transmission risk in older children, although international evidence suggests that risk of infection, disease and transmission is likely to be higher in older than younger children [21,22].

There is little evidence at this time of transmission to and from children in the wider community or educational settings, especially in nursery and primary schools to which large numbers of children returned in England in June and July 2020. However, the numbers of children who are likely to attend from September 2020 onwards would be substantially greater than during the summer mini-term just completed. Data from secondary schools are insufficient to form a clear assessment of risk at this time because attendance rates there have been much lower.

## **Recommendations**

- Track and trace approaches for household contacts should be optimised to identify staff and students with infection quickly to reduce the risk of introduction into school settings.
- Given the seemingly greater risk of transmission in staff than children, emphasis should be placed on increased staff support and education regarding infection risk in the community, infection control between staff in school, and where possible between staff and students.
- Evidence suggests that rates of transmission in pre-school and primary school settings are low. Qualitative reports indicate that social distancing between younger children is hard to achieve; there

should, therefore, be a clearer focus on hand washing and other IPC measures

- A different focus is likely to be needed in secondary schools, where the shortage of available evidence means that vigilance will need to be maintained. In particular, generating high quality surveillance data – especially in the first few months following re-opening in September – will be essential to robust assessment of transmission risk.

#### **Foot notes (alphabetic) and references [numeric]**

(a) Note this is for the period February-June 2020 – revised estimates up to August are being generated currently.

(b) This study did not consider primary cases, so it is not possible to comment on the direction of transmission to the index case.

(c) Although educational settings have been open to vulnerable children and those of keyworkers throughout lockdown (from 23/03/20 onwards), formal re-opening to all children began on 1st June, starting with nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils. From 15 June, secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges were asked to provide face-to-face educational support to students in years 10 and 12.

(d) “Educational settings” incorporate nurseries, preschools, infant schools, junior schools, primary schools, secondary schools, further education colleges, and settings for children who have special educational needs.

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# sKIDs COVID-19 surveillance in school KIDs

*Prospective active national surveillance of preschools and primary schools for SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in England, June 2020, (sKIDs COVID-19 surveillance in school KIDs), Shamez Ladhami and a PHE team, Public Health England (PHE), PHE publications gateway number: GW-1559, published on Friday 4 September 2020. This is a report on the paper and does not include a number of the tables and graphs in the original. For access to these and to the original paper in full, go to:*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/914700/sKIDs\\_Phase1Report\\_01sep2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/914700/sKIDs_Phase1Report_01sep2020.pdf)

**The researchers found very few infections and transmission events in 131 educational settings during the 4-6 week summer half-term from 1 June to mid-July 2020. Where a SARS-CoV-2 positive case was identified, they did not find any additional cases within the household, class bubble or wider education setting when tested.**

There were 12,047 participants in 131 schools had 43,039 swabs taken. The SARS-CoV-2 infection rate was:

- a. 3.9 /100,000/week (1 per 25,674; 95% CI, 0.10 to 21.7) in students
- b. 11.3/100,000/week (2 per 17,695; 95% CI, 1.40-40.8) in staff

Non-white ethnicity and having a history of COVID-19 like symptoms were significantly associated with seropositivity in both students and staff, but not school attendance or time spent in school during lockdown.

The COVID-19 Surveillance in School KIDs (sKIDs) study included two arms: weekly nasal swabs for at least four weeks and blood sampling with nasal and throat swabs at the beginning (early June) and end of half-term (mid-July).

A total of 12,026 participants in 131 schools had 43,039 swabs taken. SARS-CoV-2 infection rate of 3.9 /100,000/week (1/25,674; 95% CI, 0.10 to 21.7) in students and 11.3/100,000/week (2/17,695; 95% CI, 1.4-40.8) in staff. Where a SARS-CoV-2 positive case was identified, there were no additional cases in the household, class bubble or wider education setting when tested. SARS-CoV-2 seropositivity was 10.6% (86/814; 95%CI, 8.5-12.9%) in students and 12.7% (167/1316; 95%CI, 10.9-14.6%) in staff (p=0.14). Non-white ethnicity, a history of COVID-19 like symptoms and having a healthcare worker in the household were significantly associated with seropositivity in both students and staff, but not school attendance, time spent in school or level of contact between staff and students.

## Conclusions

SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission rates were low in preschool and primary schools under surveillance. Seropositivity rates in students and staff were similar and not associated with school attendance during the lockdown. Similar studies are needed in secondary schools and higher educational settings.

## Introduction

The declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic led most countries to close their schools as part of their national lockdown measures, [1-3] with more than one billion children and young people – equivalent to two-thirds of enrolled learners worldwide – affected so far. [4] Although children were recognised to contribute to only a small proportion of confirmed COVID-19 cases and rarely developed severe or fatal disease [5,6], their role in asymptomatic infection and transmission, which is well described for other respiratory viral infections such as influenza, was uncertain. The close proximity of children – especially young children – in educational settings could lead to rapid transmission not only between the children and staff but also to their household contacts and potentially the wider community. This is well-described for other viral infections, including influenza, where children are known to be the main drivers of infection and transmission. [7,8] Experience from previous coronavirus outbreaks, including middle east respiratory

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syndrome (MERS) and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), suggest that school closures did not contribute to the control of these epidemics. [3] School closures not only affects education but can also have a negative impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of children, [3] especially those from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds. [9]

In England, a rapid increase in SARS-CoV-2 since early March 2020 led to school closures on 20 March and wider lockdown on 23 March. [10] Children of key workers including healthcare workers and vulnerable children, however, had the option to attend school throughout the lockdown. [11] Nationally, COVID-19 cases plateaued in mid-April 2020 and then declined, allowing gradual easing of lockdown measures. [12]

Preschool and some primary school years (nursery [3-4 year-olds], reception [4-5 year-olds], years 1 [5-6 year-olds] and 6 [10-11 year-olds]) were allowed to open from 1 June and some secondary school years (years 10 [14-15 year-olds] and 12 [16-17 year-olds]) reopened from 15 June 2020 until the end of the summer half-term (4-6 weeks). [13] Strict social distancing and infection control measures were implemented for staff and students, including smaller class sizes and clustering staff and students into self-contained bubbles. [13] The decision to re-open schools has been divisive in England and worldwide. Whilst the benefits of children returning to school cannot be denied, parents and school staff remain concerned about the risk of infection and transmission within educational settings, potentially putting the students, staff and their household members at risk of infection. To address this question, Public Health England (PHE) initiated a prospective national study monitoring SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in students and staff attending preschools and primary schools during the summer half-term in England.

## **Methods**

The COVID-19 Surveillance in School KIDs (sKIDs) study involved two arms (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-paediatric-surveillance>). [14] In the swabs arm, schools across England with least 30 students attending for at least 4 weeks during the summer half-term were approached to take part in the study. The investigators worked with the department of education, local healthcare Trusts, health protection teams and the Local Authority to identify a local experienced person to take nasal swabs from students, such as a local nurse or first aider. Staff members selfswabbed under supervision. For the serology arm, schools that were not participating in weekly swabbing were approached in five regions where a paediatric investigation team could be assembled: North London, East London, Oxford, Derby and Manchester.

For all schools, the headteacher sent the study information pack to staff and parents and asked them to return a signed consent form and completed questionnaire before the sampling day. Written informed consent was obtained from staff and parents/guardians of participating students and a questionnaire completed at the beginning and end of the summer half-term. In the swabbing schools, a nasal swab was taken on the same day every week and couriered to the PHE national reference centre for testing. The investigators worked closely with schools to test unwell staff and students for SARS-CoV-2 either through local testing or by posting swabs to their homes. Headteachers, staff and parents were asked to notify PHE if any participant tested positive for COVID-19 or was a contact of positive case. At the end of the summer half-term, participants were also asked whether they had taken any time off school because they or someone in their school bubble had confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection. SARS-CoV-2 positive participants were invited to enrol in a household transmission study, where all household members were swabbed and then had blood samples take for antibody testing 4-6 weeks later.

In serology schools, a team of clinicians, nurses, phlebotomists and administrative staff attended the school within two weeks of school opening. Local anaesthetic cream was offered to all students before blood sampling. A class teacher was present with each student; in some schools, some parents were allowed to attend the session with their child at the beginning or end of the school day. A nose and throat swab were obtained from the students at the same time. Participating staff also had a blood sample and throat swab taken by the investigation team; the staff took their own nose swab at some sites.

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### **Laboratory testing**

Swabs were tested and results reported typically within 48 hours. Nucleic acid was extracted from samples and analysed by a real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction RT-PCR assay on an Applied Biosystems 7500 FAST system targeting a conserved region of the open reading frame (ORF1ab) gene of SARS-CoV-2. [15] A positive RT-PCR result was reported to the participant, local investigator, head teacher and local PHE health protection team. The participant and household members self-isolated as per national guidance. Public health risk assessment was undertaken with the school to decide additional measures, including isolation of the participant's school bubble. Serology was performed using a chemiluminescent microparticle immunoglobulin G (IgG) immunoassay targeting the nucleoprotein (SARS-CoV-2 IgG, Abbott Commerce Chicago, USA).[16]

### **Data management and investigations**

Questionnaire data were entered into Microsoft Access and analysed using Stata v.15.0. continuous data with a normal distribution are described as mean with standard deviation or as median with interquartile range in they did not have a normal distribution. Categorical data are described as proportions and compared with the 2-test of Fisher's exact. To account for missing data on student/staff status, we assumed that the student:staff ratio in participants with missing information was the same as the proportion with available information. Tests for association with SARS-CoV-2 antibody positivity were performed using logistic regression. A multivariable regression model was built using likelihood ratio tests and included factors that were statistically significant in the univariable analysis, or that did not have large amounts of missing data. School attendance was not statistically significant in the model for student and not included in the multivariable analysis.

Being unwell with COVID-19 like illness or having confirmed COVID-19 were not included in the multivariable analyses because of their strong correlation with seropositivity. Univariable analysis including only participants in the complete case multivariable analysis was performed in addition to the final multivariable analysis to ensure that the results were consistent. Differences between schools were tested for using clustering on the final multivariable models.

### **Results**

In total, there were 12,026 participants in 131 schools with a median of 93 (IQR, 62-155) participants in the 86 schools taking part in weekly swabbing and 43 (30-69) in the 45 schools participating in serology testing (Figure 1). Overall, 59.1% (6,441/10,890) of those with available data were students and 40.9% (4,449/10,890) were staff. Of the 43,039 swabs taken, 23,358 (59.3%) with available information were from students and 16,052 (40.7%) were from staff. The number of swabs taken increased from the beginning of June 2020 and peaked in the last week of June before declining. One student and five staff had detectable SARS-CoV-2 on their nose or throat swabs. Three (two previously symptomatic, one asymptomatic) staff had very high RT-PCR cycle threshold values (>39) consistent with very low viral load, and, when the sample was concentrated and re-analysed, tested negative; all three were also antibody negative 4-6 weeks later. Of the remaining confirmed infections, the single asymptomatic student was a child of a healthcare worker who had been symptomatic and tested RT-PCR positive on nasopharyngeal swabbing four weeks previously. After adjusting for missing staff/student status, we estimated a swab positivity rate of 3.9 (1/25,537; 95% CI, 0.10 to 21.8) per 100,000 students and 11.3 (2/17,554; 95% CI, 1.4-41.2) per 100,000 staff per week of testing.

### **Testing of household and school contacts**

As a precaution, all six participants with detectable SARS-CoV-2 on their swabs along with their household contacts and school class bubbles were asked to self-isolate for 14 days. Their household contacts were offered a nasal swab; all those tested were negative and none became symptomatic during follow-up. Additionally, Teacher E's school bubble was offered nasal swab testing for SARS-CoV-2 and all were negative. Teacher F worked in a special education needs school and was part of an outbreak involving two

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teachers. This teacher became symptomatic and tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 48 hours after the third negative weekly swab. Another staff member working in different bubble also became symptomatic and tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, leading the school to close for the remaining two weeks. Local public health teams tested every student and staff member but did not identify any additional cases in the school.

### **Serology**

SARS-CoV-2 antibody positivity was 11.9% (253/2,163; 95%CI, 10.5-13.3%) overall, including 10.6% (86/814; 95%CI, 8.5-12.9%) in students and 12.7% (167/1316; 95%CI, 10.9-14.6%) in staff ( $p=0.14$ ). Antibody positivity varied across the different English regions, but within regions was similar between staff, students and community based seroprevalence during the same week. In two regions, antibody positivity was higher in students than staff but this was not statistically significant. For both students and staff, after adjusting for other variables included in the final model (and differences between schools for staff;  $p=0.0026$  for clustering), antibody positivity was associated with non-white ethnicity and having a history of COVID-19 like symptoms, but not with school attendance or with frequency of school attendance during the lockdown. Students who were children of healthcare workers, but not other keyworkers, were also significantly more likely to be antibody positive. In staff members, too, antibody positivity was associated with having a healthcare worker in the household. Only 20.9% (18/86) of seropositive students reported COVID-19 like illness compared to 60.1% (101/168) of staff ( $p<0.001$ ).

### **Discussion**

Active prospective surveillance identified very low rates of SARS-CoV-2 infection or transmission in schools during the summer half-term in England. Only 3/43,039 swabs from 12,026 participants had SARS-CoV-2 infection. SARS-CoV-2 seropositivity was 10.6% in students and 12.7% in staff at the start of the summer half-term. We found no association between antibody positivity and either school attendance or exposure to educational settings during the lockdown period. The level of staff exposure to students was also not associated with antibody positivity.

Instead, non-white ethnicity, being symptomatic with COVID-19 like symptoms and having a healthcare worker in the household were major determinants of seropositivity in both students and staff. In England, school re-opening involved a phased, partial opening of preschool and some primary and secondary school years during the short 4-6 week half-term, with strict physical distancing and infection control precautions. We implemented a twoarm surveillance programme to assess SARS-CoV-2 infection risk in anticipation of all schools reopening fully in September. We successfully recruited large numbers of students and staff across a wide range of educational settings and found very low swab positivity rates. Three participants with an initial positive swab subsequently tested negative with no evidence of antibody development 4-6 weeks later, highlighting the risk of false positivity associated with mass testing during periods of low community prevalence, even with the most specific assays. [18] Additionally, while weekly testing was reassuring for the participating schools, both the child of a healthcare worker and the two symptomatic teachers could potentially have been picked up through effective contact tracing and community testing, respectively. Reassuringly, we found no evidence of secondary transmission to household or schools contacts of the three index cases.

### **Serology**

The similar contemporaneous seropositivity rates in staff and students indicates that children are as likely to be infected with SARS-CoV-2 as adults and, since they represent only 1-3% of confirmed COVID-19 cases, [14,19] suggests that they are more likely than adults to have asymptomatic or mild disease. This contrasts with recent reports suggesting that children have a lower susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection. [6,20] The few published population-based seroprevalence studies have included very few or no children.<sup>1</sup> Others have utilised residual sera from children presenting to healthcare, random household sampling which is influenced by parental risk factors, or been undertaken during outbreak investigations, making age

comparisons and interpretations difficult. [1] This study is unique in that it allows comparison of independent groups of children (students) and adults (staff) from the same community. One explanation for the reported lower seroprevalence in children compared to adults may be a lower risk of virus exposure during the lockdown.

The lack of association between seropositivity and school attendance during the lockdown is an important finding, especially given that only children of keyworkers and vulnerable children attended schools during the lockdown. Since keyworkers, especially frontline healthcare workers, were more likely to be infected with SARS-CoV-2, [21] and develop COVID-19, [22] particularly at the start of the UK epidemic when universal testing and personal protective equipment in healthcare settings was limited, their children would have been at increased risk of household exposure to the virus. Children of healthcare workers were significantly more likely to be seropositive than other children in our cohort. At the same time, children remaining at home were as likely to be seropositive as those attending school during the lockdown. Household secondary attack rates are 10-fold higher than any other setting. [23]

This, together with our findings supports the return of children back to school. There are few other similar studies for comparison, but in Sweden, which kept preschools and primary schools open with social distancing and infection prevention measures, repeated serosurveys among non-COVID-19 primary care patients in nine counties during weeks 18–21 showed similar seropositivity rates in <20 year-olds and working-age adults. [1,24] Seropositivity among staff (and students) was similar to community seroprevalence at the time, providing additional reassurance that they are at similar risk of infection compared to other professions. [21] We also found higher seropositivity in staff who did not attend school during lockdown. This could be due to the increased risk of exposure to high-risk household members, such as healthcare workers and keyworkers, or more opportunities for acquiring the infection in the community, or both. For both staff and students, the significant association between antibody positivity and a history of COVID-19 like symptoms is an important validation finding. The higher seropositivity in black and minority ethnic groups is also consistent with the published literature, [25] although to our knowledge this the first report in children.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The strength of this surveillance is the large numbers of schools and participants recruited within two weeks of schools re-opening and highlight the willingness of parents to allow their children to take part in school surveillance. An important limitation is that the surveillance was conducted after easing of lockdown when SARS-CoV-2 infection rates were at their lowest. Also, only a few school years were open and extensive social distancing and infection control measures were in place, with small class sizes clustered into defined bubbles and many children attending school for only some days every week. Moreover, the study was open to all staff and students but the characteristics of those who took part – and, therefore, risk factors such as household contacts – may be different to those who did not consent.

Additionally, we did not collect samples at the start of the lockdown and, therefore, cannot comment on whether seropositive participants might have been exposed to SARS-Cov-2 in school prior to lockdown. Finally, our findings cannot be extrapolated to senior schools, [2] because the risk of SARS-CoV-2 exposure, asymptomatic infection and symptomatic disease in teenagers is likely to be different to younger children, [26,27] with a potentially higher propensity for SARS-CoV-2 transmission and outbreaks in senior schools, [28,29] compared to primary schools. [28]

### **Conclusions**

We found no evidence of an increased risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection in students or staff attending school during the summer half-term in England. SARS-CoV-2 infection rates were very low, with no secondary cases identified among household or school contacts. SARS-CoV-2 seropositivity rates were similar in students and staff indicating that children do get infected but may be more likely to have asymptomatic or mild illness. Similar studies are needed in secondary schools and higher education settings where the risk of infection, transmission and disease are likely to be different.

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# Universities and SARS-CoV-2

*Independent SAGE-Behaviour Group Consultation Statement on Universities in the context of SARS-CoV-2*, The Independent SAGE Report 9, The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), published on 21 August 2020. The paper is reproduced here but not the appendices, which can be found at <https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:8606a4a2-9237-4f70-8e8e-8a5384a8db39#pageNum=1>

**In this research paper Independent SAGE (indie SAGE) recommend that to protect the safety of students, staff and prevent community infections all University courses should be offered remotely and online, unless they involve practical training or lab work. They make a number of specific recommendations that follow from this.**

1. Universities should focus on providing excellent quality remote learning rather than on opening up campuses that are likely to close again.
2. For students who are studying from home the government should provide support through local COVID-safe study hubs and grants for technology and wifi.
3. If students have to attend campus a COVID-safe university should be secured through:
  - i. Testing on or before arrival on campus followed up by further regular testing of students and staff.
  - ii. Online welcome week and teaching in the first two weeks of term along with restrictions of social activities among students where feasible.
  - iii. Mitigations in classrooms including masks, social distancing of two meters as the norm and regular cleaning.
  - iv. Residential bubbles.
  - v. A social agreement of COVID-safe behaviours on campus. This should cover students, teachers and all university support staff.
  - vi. Full consultation with University staff, rigorous health and safety procedures and attention to equality and diversity issues.

Indie SAGE believes that these measures are essential in order to deliver the best education to students, while also preventing clusters of infection and transmission to local communities of COVID-19. Without these it is unlikely that universities can realistically deliver on their mission to provide the best student educational experience.

This autumn will see the mass movement and migration of millions of people to university campuses and towns. This will affect not just university employees and students but also the communities within the towns and cities and hosting these universities. This consultation report sets out recommendations for best practice regarding the behavioural implementation of and adherence to measures for a Zero COVID University and a COVID-Safe Student Experience ahead of the new university terms across the UK in September and October 2020.

The risks are tangible. In the USA universities like the University of North Carolina and University of Notre Dame have had to shut down on-campus teaching soon after the start of the academic year due to COVID outbreaks. In at least one case, this was due to lack of infection control at social events.

## **Key Recommendations for a Zero COVID University and a COVID-Safe Student Experience**

Becoming a student involves far more than timetabled hours of teaching and learning. Universities UK (UUK) measures the 'student experience' in terms of the social and cultural dimensions via student societies, facilities, sports, and social life. Many students move to another town to attend university rather than attend their local HEI for multiple reasons. To enable this important rite of passage, we recommend the following:

- Independent SAGE challenges UUK's position that students should be offered "significant in-person teaching" on the basis that in-person modes of delivery carry the most risk of transmission (prolonged interactions in enclosed indoor spaces). They are also the most disruptive for staff and student planning

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and workload intensity alongside off-on lockdown measures, COVID-19 infection, isolation, and sickness.

- We recommend maximizing the remote delivery of and participation in degree programmes for all but lab-based or practice-based programmes and/or student/staff support services that cannot be delivered online, with semester-by-semester or term-by-term review points, planned well ahead.
- While universities should “be cautious when abandoning conventional, in-person and socializing model”, [1] we also recommend that universities invest in creative, innovative technological solutions for the longer-term. Rather than regarding remote learning as ‘reduced quality’ by default, research shows the opposite can be the case. [2] The demonstration of innovative and effective online academic experiences is also led by young researchers [3] (e.g., PhD students), so online learning modes may involve students directly shaping their learning experiences as well as wider COVID-Safe campus policies.
- For students, enabling remote learning requires extensive government support for digital accessibility and safe remote working. A programme should be implemented via funding from the government through universities to provide equipment, and faster broadband accessibility. In addition, universities should check with their students that they have access to workspaces at home and to equipment. If they do not have workspaces then the government should consider setting up smaller local hubs for University students to study in. We suggest that these should be local libraries, which need to be funded and made safe for study. Where University courses involve lab-based work or courses with practical elements (such as performing arts, sciences, arts courses we recommend the following practices to create a COVID-Safe University:
  - A clear strategy for testing of students and staff to minimise university-related spread. We recognise that UK universities will vary with regard to on-site testing facilities, and relationships to local health services and public health agencies. Some are within large cities and others on remote campuses. Halls of residence are likely to be a main source of spread. Mindful of this variation, we recommend that there is a low threshold for testing, which could be undertaken routinely, also in conjunction with temperature checks on entering buildings.

There needs to be clear clinical and public health oversight to ensure appropriate advice, action and support can be provided for those testing positive. Care is needed to ensure students testing positive are able to quarantine appropriately, and that their educational disadvantage is minimised. Such testing programmes are also being undertaken on university campuses globally.

- UK students should also be asked to restrict face to face activities and social interactions for the first two weeks of term. Interactions should be within residential bubbles and online classes and welcome activities should be offered.
- To achieve a COVID-Safe University, levels, modes, and types of activity on campus should be calibrated to the good/poor TTI practices at local airports/borders; established and functioning TTI locally, and low community transmission (less than 2/1000 on campus and surrounding towns). On this basis, and as of August 2020, universities vary in whether they can plan for, and/or should be enabling or minimizing, on-campus working for its staff and students.
- For university towns and cities, where students represent large proportions of the population, transport authorities should consider laying on increased number of buses and trains to and from campus to support social distancing.

### **Why are we focusing on Universities rather than any other large organization?**

Universities present specific challenges regarding COVID-19 safety in addition to those faced by other large organizations (see Independent SAGE’s COVID-19 Safe Workplace Charter) and schools for the following reasons:

- Core to university operations is the mass movement and mass migration of a million or more people around the world, at multiple points of the year (at least the start and end of every term, if not more frequently). A report from the Department for Education (DfE) to SAGE in June 2020 included the following implications:
  - a. “Students moving from their family households to set up new, temporary households during term time, and will want to return to their family households at the end of term. This may vary from small shared households with fully mixed living environments, to large scale university accommodation blocks;

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- b. "Additional pressure on public transport infrastructure around universities, particularly if there is a continued need to limit capacity to preserve social distancing;
- c. "Commuter students, who travel regularly to university from home. About 25% of fulltime undergraduate students are now commuter students. In 2018, in 10 universities, including City University London, University of Wolverhampton and University of Bradford, more than 50% of students lived in the parental home.
- d. "International students arriving from overseas will create a further potential impact on the transmission of the virus, although some students, depending on the country they are arriving from, will have to comply with a 14 day self-isolation expectations upon arrival to the UK." [4]
- Universities also vary greatly in their physical organization, from central city to campus locations, connected to large and smaller towns and cities, with larger and smaller international populations, and many or few postgraduate students, making implementation of consistent safe behaviours complex.
  - Most students in the UK are under 25 and therefore more likely to be asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19, and thus undetected. There is a concern that the spread may be masked by so-called 'Freshers' flu'. Further, there is increasing evidence of a surge of infections in young people which has led to WHO issuing a specific warning [5]
  - Most students are in the age group which the latest data shows has the lowest level of both complete and partial compliance with social distancing rules.
  - Around the world, many of our recommendations have been implemented outside of the UK. In addition:
    - Unlike school-aged students, university students are adults with more resources and more autonomy to decide where to travel to, where to live, etc., including whether or not to travel to their parental home if they fall ill.
    - If campus facilities are closed, this "may prompt staff and students to visit external cafés or travel home to eat, which could lead to higher risk of transmission." In other words, universities will likely have to consider risks in the community, not just on campus." [6]
    - Local spikes in COVID-19 cases may be attributed (accurately or not) to imported students (including in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, where cases will be readily attributable to English and international students), leading to local resentment, conflict, weakened town/gown relations.
    - The heterogeneity of University populations intensifies opportunities for targeted stigma (e.g., against students from China in the first wave), and of difficult relationships between students leading to blame culture.
    - Also core to University operations is a particular intensity, variety, number, and duration of (teaching) interactions, with constantly changing populations, in enclosed indoor spaces, increasing the likelihood of 'superspreader events'.
    - Students also socialise together - in each other's rooms, in university bars, at parties, at sports and other clubs, with alcohol.
    - Students may be reluctant to get tested if it means they and their friends must isolate for 14 days. There may be further reluctance for contacts to isolate - especially if they are repeatedly contacted for different cases.
    - There is potential to make assumptions about what motivates people (e.g., the erroneous concept of 'behavioural fatigue') leading to stereotyped assumptions about what students want (hence this consultation, in part) and what they will and will not adhere to mitigating behaviours. In short, what happens on campus has direct implications for the wider populations in the town, city, regional, and (inter)national communities that Universities operate within.

### **Policy, practice, and procedural challenges**

The Chief Executive of Universities UK, Alistair Jarvis, stated that "most students can expect significant in-person teaching and a wide range of social activities and support services [with] an engaging academic and social experience." [7] At the same time, "the National Union of Students (NUS) says a third of students are worried about safety, staff are inevitably starting to raise concerns, and there are growing worries about

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the ability of Estates Directors to actually create COVID-secure campuses as our understanding of viral transmission improves.” [8] Media reports from the UK and overseas are already reporting ‘blame and shame’ stories about student and policy U-turns. [9] The UUK commitment to the provision of in-person teaching is driving the need to address complex logistical and behavioural practices and mitigations. In England, where students pay fees [10], market forces have resulted in a focus on maintaining quality of ‘student experience’ in terms of teaching and learning (rather than other aspects such as social life, or sports). This has produced a mixed picture of teaching and learning and with universities in different positions with regards to what they are able to offer. While some have stated that, for example, all lectures will be online-only [9], others are adopting hybrid models, increasing the likelihood of constant disruption as cases increase and decrease alongside on-off local and national lockdowns.

With the drive to ensure students take up places, use campus facilities and accommodation, there is a strong drive to operate ‘business as usual’, in contrast to many universities elsewhere. This means that there is potential to focus less on the health and safety of staff required to deliver the student experience: academic / research staff, professional services (including frontline student-facing services), estates & facilities, IT, and contracted staff (e.g., cleaners). Thus, Independent SAGE recommends minimizing in-person teaching to essential lab- and practice-based teaching and student support services, where online is not practical, unless COVID-19 cases are established as less than 2/1000 on campus and surrounding towns.

Currently, there is significant variation in approaches by regional public health authorities causing confusion and cumulative imprecision, which hinders behavioural implementation. For example:

1. There is a lack of clarity and consistency around testing and containment, particularly for Universities that have campuses that cross boundaries or have campuses in multiple regions.
2. There is variation across the UK in how Universities are planning for core activities such as inperson teaching in enclosed indoor spaces.
3. There is no consistent guidance about likely maximum numbers that can gather in COVID secure premises, including student societies, sports fixtures, drama, music, debating, and so on.
4. Universities often comprise tens or hundreds of separate buildings which vary enormously in their affordances or constraints for physical distancing and reducing aerosol transmission via inconsistent ventilation abilities.
5. What counts as a household, a bubble, and a gathering, is complex and varied [12]. For instance, a ‘hall’ or ‘household’ bubble is unlikely to overlap with multiple seminar or tutorial group bubbles.
6. Segmentation is not possible as in schools as students take courses in different departments and any such division would require a drastic change in course requirements and structure that cannot be made at short notice.
7. Like elsewhere in the population, there is a need to balance the risk of student mental health linked to isolation versus risk of transmission.

### **Recommendations for a Zero COVID University**

The aims of the measures suggested below are to mitigate risk and create strong social norms; that is, a collective sense of responsibility and personal agency to avoid university closures. It is crucial to have clear and consistent messaging about policies, practices, and procedures, across all channels (see Appendix B for an exemplar strategy, although that is not included here). There must also be clear procedures for implementation in behaviourally specific terms – who needs to do what, where, and when, rather than agentless information ‘dumps’ or emails.

Clear policies and practices will make it easier for students from different countries to come to the UK knowing that these are in place to protect them both from COVID-19 (and other SARS) and from attacks by those who blame them if there is a spike due to a lack of planning and implementation.

#### **a. For staff who cannot work from home and before students arrive on campus:**

Note: ‘Staff’ refers to all job families including academic and research staff, professional services, estates and facilities, IT, contracted staff (e.g., cleaners) and ‘students’ refers to UG, PGT, PGR.

- Survey all staff to assess their needs, concerns, and preferences around working on campus and

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teaching in person, where in-person contact (e.g., lab and practice-based courses; some student services) is necessary to deliver programmes.

- Conduct mandatory testing of UK students either before they come to campus or as soon as they arrive on campus. All university staff should also be tested at the start of term. This process should utilise university based, community, health service or public health led testing initiatives. We recommend regular testing to capture asymptomatic infections, and also as a mechanism to identify potential outbreaks. The precise details of the testing and monitoring regime should be determined in advance of campus opening, and considering local testing facilities, and risk assessment. There needs to be clear clinical and public health oversight to ensure appropriate advice, action and support can be provided for those testing positive.
- All students, including UK students, should also be asked to restrict social interactions for two weeks maintaining residential bubbles and they should attend online classes and welcome events to prevent infection.
- Include a statement on adhering to quarantine in student codes of conduct (including disciplinary procedures if breaking of quarantine after a positive test result).
- Make pre-registration (for students) online training and information mandatory for all. Advise students for the two weeks before they come onto campus how they can practice safer COVID-19 behaviours in the lead up to their attendance at University.
- Include a 'Social Agreement for a Safer Campus' pledge (see example in Appendix A, not included here) in preregistration and online training. The contract, of mutual responsibility for each other's health and well-being, should focus on support and respect rather than shame and blame, but include how to intervene if people are behaving irresponsibly and possible disciplinary measures.

**b. Implementation on campus for students and staff:**

- Monitor students daily during quarantine and provide support to self-isolating students (e.g., delivering meals on campus and to other accommodation; conduct well-being checks via phone or video chat).
- Provide regular check-in support to self-isolating staff in all job families.
- Align mandatory use of face coverings on university sites with mandatory use of face coverings in public transport/shops.
- Publish and publicize consistent guidance on 2m distancing practices.
- Identify flows of students and staff around campus which ensure that social distancing can be maintained.
- Ensure clear information and implementation of hygiene/disinfection guidance for lecture theatres, residential buildings, offices, restaurants (e.g., Use booking systems in libraries and ensure cleaning takes place at the end of each time slot).
- "SPIMO is working on the assumption that as part of efforts to manage social distancing effectively, universities should be planning to "timetable effectively in a way that staggers arrival and departure times in a way that will also reduce pressure on public transport to an extent." [13]
- Establish clear guidance for how to configure new households in halls and other shared accommodation.
- Ensure a clear strategy and implementation regarding "bubbles", households, and gatherings. On bubbles, SAGE has "consistently advised caution" around the application of bubbles, but for universities recommends that the term "bubble" is not used – instead, where it can be done, referring to "segmenting of the population" instead. [14]
- For catering outlets, follow national guidance, but maximize takeaway and eating outside.
- Follow individual risk assessments mutually agreed with each member of staff to the direct implications for individual shared or sole-occupied offices and related working environments (e.g., kitchens, bathrooms).
- For all measures, including risk assessments, take Equality and Diversity issues into account so as to protect and support students and employees.

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**c. Planning for essential in-person teaching (e.g., lab- and practice-based subjects) and other in-person contact with students:**

Minimal in-person teaching will reduce the likely ramifications of in-person and hybrid models for staff and students who may develop symptoms and need to self-isolate or may at any point be subject to local lockdown, requiring a constant reorganizing of whatever face-to-face teaching has been organized, including last-minute personnel and room changes. It would mitigate the intensification of work for staff by removing unnecessary duplication of (largely teaching) effort that risks burnout. Some of the rhetoric about the need for in-person teaching rests on incorrect assumptions about the reduced quality of online communication. [15]

Furthermore, while measures to reduce all modes of transmission in teaching spaces may be in place, reviews of evidence from Independent SAGE strongly suggest that online delivery should be the norm rather than the exception (with exceptions as above: lab-based sciences, drama, practice based learning like medicine or teacher training) with termly review points. Where sustained contact between staff and students is essential, including student support provision.

- Provide information (per-room risk assessments) about safe ventilation, equipment (e.g. PPE), and so on, to staff and students to ensure that key health and safety measures are not left to individual interpretation, assessment, or choice.
- Publish thresholds of infection within certain subjects/labs which would require closing of that facility, or a stop to face-to-face teaching and moving online (but what are implications for this acting as a disincentive to get tested if you are close to threshold?)

**d. Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments**

- Ensure that all measures introduced to deal with COVID-19 on campus are viewed through an Equality and Diversity perspective by conducting regular EDI assessments, including the implications for caring responsibilities/gender, and are systematically embedded in Return to Campus processes.
- Regularly survey staff across all job families and career stages to elicit and act upon concerns, preferences, personal risk situation, caring responsibilities leading to an individual risk assessment mutually agreed with each relevant member of staff.
- Implement an explicit COVID social agreement in the campus community, which makes everyone responsible for each other's health but at the same time counteracts blame narratives. There may also need to be targeted comms led by University comms teams to prevent and counteract any blame narratives that emerge.
- Ensure a social media code of conduct is in place to mitigate conspiracy theories online leading to offline attacks.

**e. Ensuring an Equal Learning Environment for Non-Campus Based Students**

For the students who are not attending university there needs to be a joined-up policy initiative between government and educational institutions. This would assure access to technology, study materials and safe spaces for students not on campus. Lack of these will particularly affect the most disadvantaged students who may live in cramped homes, or areas that do not have access to fast broadband and cannot afford technologies. We recommend:

- The Government makes available a means tested student-at-home fund to which students can apply for grants to support home learning.
- The University surveys its students who are studying at home to check they have adequate provision and encourages students who do not have these to apply for government funds.
- The Government makes it a priority to fund and make COVID-safe local libraries in which at home students can study safely. Local libraries have been decimated in funding cuts over the past ten years and now need immediate large-scale investment. If this is not possible other 'study-hubs' created within the large amounts of empty offices and retail space in high streets should be provided. These can be used as long as infection rates remain low in the local area.
- The Government should immediately invest in and deliver on digital inclusion strategies and a

*(Continued on page 53.)*

*(Continued from page 52.)*

nationally standard subsidised or free-to-students fast broadband service.

### **Caveat**

In this paper we have not discussed the situation of further education colleges as these do not involve such large-scale movements of people as for Universities. However, they merit further discussion especially as they provide education for disadvantaged young adults. We will consider this in the future.

### **Appendices**

The paper includes two appendices which are not included here. Appendix A is a draft *Social Contract for a Safer Campus*. Appendix B is *Principles for organisational communication for universities and related organisations in the context of COVID-19*.

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## Universities Minister addresses sector ahead of academic year

**D**uring a speech delivered remotely, Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan, thanked Universities UK members for their innovation and looked ahead to the upcoming academic year. She said that her number one priority had been to ensure that the Government supported universities too increase capacity, so that as many students as possible could study at their preferred university which their grades had unlocked. Ms Donelan added that to do so, the Government had announced the removal of student number controls and the removal of student number caps for medical, dentistry and veterinary medical places.

But she acknowledged that the following months would be very different for the sector as social distancing measures were introduced, as well as blended learning and COVID-secure measures. The minister said that while the Government would lead from the front with a communications plan, it would need universities to continue to uphold their duty of care and responsibility to student and staff health and wellbeing, by following the guidance and reinforcing the importance of it as well as enforcing it - both for students and staff. She stressed that the reality was that campuses could only stay open if the guidance was followed.

Ms Donelan said that because responding to a pandemic demanded an agile and immediate reaction and a clear sense of purpose, having worked closely with the science minister, Amanda Solloway and the minister for innovation, Lord Bethell, she could announce a range of measures to reduce the bureaucratic burden across higher education and free up time to prioritise frontline teaching and research.

### Unnecessary bureaucracy

The Minister said that the DfE had worked with the OfS, UKRI and the Department of Health and Social Care to identify a number of sources of unnecessary bureaucracy that would be removed immediately. The minister added that her Department would look at further cuts during a system-wide review over the coming months. She pointed out that the measures outlined in the DfE policy document included: reductions in the data universities and other HE providers would need to supply; reductions in monitoring measures, and reviews of data collections, including a wholesale review of the National Student Survey.

Ms Donelan also pointed out that UKRI would be implementing a set of major changes to how it worked with applicants for funding, which was aimed at reducing the burden placed on researchers and innovators applying to UKRI whilst ensuring investment continued in the best ideas and people.

She said that while the current system incentivised and promoted the traditional three-year course, it did not enable readily accessible bite-sized learning for people who wanted to upskill and reskill. The minister pointed out that the Augar review had looked in detail at flexible learning and it had argued for widespread changes to the organisation and funding of higher education to enable flexibility. She added that the Government would respond to the review in parallel with the Spending Review.

Turning to mental health pressures, she said that for students, the past few months had exacerbated and created mental problems. Ms Donelan said that she had worked with the Office for Students to enable providers to draw upon Student Premium funding worth around £256 million for the academic year 2020/21 towards student hardship funds, including paying for mental health support. She added that the Student Space platform which had been funded by £3million from the Office for Students and was being led by mental health charity Student Minds, had been designed to bridge the gaps in support for students arising from the pandemic and it worked alongside existing services.

***“The Minister stressed that the reality was that campuses could only stay open if the Government’s guidance was followed.”***

## Haldane

*Haldane: The Forgotten Statesman Who Shaped Modern Britain*, by John Campbell OBE, published by C Hurst & Co., London, July 2020, £30 hardback, 616 pages. ISBN: 9781787383111.

**R**ichard Haldane is one of the few Edwardian politicians who did not become Prime Minister whose name is nevertheless still known to those with even a passing knowledge of early twentieth century history. He was the reforming War Minister in the outstanding Cabinet put together by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman after the Liberal landslide of 1906.

Haldane reformed the Army, creating the Imperial General Staff which, minus the word 'Imperial' which disappeared from the title in the 1960s, is still the way the Army is run. Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief of the British Empire Army in France which was finally victorious on the Western Front in 1918, described Haldane as "the greatest Secretary of State for War that England has ever had". He established the Advisory Committee for Aeronautics in 1909 and chaired the committee that launched the Air Service in 1912. This led to the Royal Flying Corps which later became the Royal Air Force. Yet none of these distinguished achievements would be enough to give this fascinating biography a review in an education magazine like ours.

Haldane was much more than a successful War Minister making crucial reforms in the run up to a major war. He also had a huge influence on higher education. As author John Campbell says, "No man did more to lay the foundations of our modern tertiary education system." While he is now much less well known for his work in education, in his own lifetime, which included holding the office of Lord Chancellor twice, first in the Liberal government of Asquith and later in the first Labour government under Ramsey MacDonald, it was his work in education that he was proudest of.

As this outstanding biography explains, he was influential in the founding of civic universities in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, Reading, Bristol and Southampton. "His work was fundamental to the educational institutions as diverse as London University, the LSE, the University of Wales and what is now the National University of Ireland and Queen's University Belfast. Even adult education and workers' education were integral elements of Haldane's vision."

Haldane was brought down by a campaign in the popular press led by the *Daily Express*, and taken up by the Conservatives, that quite falsely accused him of being pro-German. When Asquith was replaced by Lloyd George and the Conservatives joined the war-time coalition, the Tories demanded, and got, the resignations of Haldane at the War Office and Churchill at the Admiralty as their price for entering government. Before the Great War Haldane, who spoke fluent German, had been an admirer of Germany and in particular some of its philosophers, especially Goethe. Philosophy was one of his great interests. He was a member of the Aristotelian Society for many years, presenting numerous papers to the society, and was its president in 1907-08.

What stands out from these pages is a man of great learning, a philosopher-statesman, a lawyer of some achievement and a man who made his mark on a wide range of subjects. Within education alone, he played a key role in the founding of Imperial College, London and the London School of Economics and Political Science. He was vice president of the London Library at the time of his death in 1928, as well as a member of the Royal Society and the British Academy. On the personal side he suffered poor health all his life. He was not lucky in love, suffering a breakdown after being rejected by his first love, Agnes Kemp, in 1881 and never married after his fiancée, Valentine Ferguson, broke off their engagement in 1890. It was perhaps just as well, for she died only seven years later at the age of 33.

Richard, Viscount Haldane KT, OM, PC, FRS, FSA, FBA, KC, was a statesman of the highest distinction. He was both a radical who ended up in the Labour Party and a Liberal Imperialist. He is known today largely for his work reforming the Army, but he deserves to be known for so much more and not least his huge contribution to education. This excellent book could help bring that about.



## Government advice on COVID-19

**W**ith this issue we are making a change in the information presented here. Most of the guidance documents from the Westminster government are now updates of previously published advice, sometimes with very little change to them. Listing them all takes up a great deal of space, so from this issue we list only new documents.

On this basis, the number of new documents on COVID-19 published by the governments of the UK for the last three weeks was as shown below. One of the documents published for Scotland was issued by the Westminster UK government and the other seven were issued by the Scottish government. The period covered is the week from Monday 7 to last thing on Sunday 13 September 2020.

<u>Date</u>	<u>UK/England</u>	<u>Scotland</u>	<u>Wales</u>	<u>Northern Ireland</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
7 – 13 September	7	8	1	1	17
31 Aug – 6 Sept	8	2	0	0	10
24 – 30 August	7	8	3	1	19

### ***Package of Support for Students Who Have to Defer Their Studies***

**Date:** Friday 11 September 2020

**Source:** Department for Education

**Document type:** Policy paper

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** Details on a range of opportunities to gain new skills, undertake work placements, additional learning and career development support. This document is for students who had planned to start higher education this year but who have had to defer until next year.

The package of support provides opportunities to:

- gain new skills
- undertake work placements in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- undertake additional learning
- get career development support

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/package-of-support-for-students-who-have-to-defer-their-studies?utm\\_source=24f87710-9919-464e-abfa-e30014d86abe&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/package-of-support-for-students-who-have-to-defer-their-studies?utm_source=24f87710-9919-464e-abfa-e30014d86abe&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

### ***PHE: SARS-CoV-2 Susceptibility and Transmission of Risk in Children: An overview of current evidence from PHE surveillance work, 19 August 2020***

**Date:** Friday 11 September, 2020

**Source:** Public Health England (PHE) paper prepared for the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

**Document type:** Research

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** Paper by PHE on SARS-CoV2 susceptibility and transmission risks in children. It was considered at SAGE's 53rd meeting on COVID-19 on 27 August 2020.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-sars-cov2-susceptibility-and-transmission-risk-in-children-an-overview-of-current-evidence-from-phe-surveillance-work-19-august-2020?utm\\_source=cbf3a81c-e288-4217-a546-c59d9c7b59f2&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-sars-cov2-susceptibility-and-transmission-risk-in-children-an-overview-of-current-evidence-from-phe-surveillance-work-19-august-2020?utm_source=cbf3a81c-e288-4217-a546-c59d9c7b59f2&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

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***PHE: Prospective active national surveillance of preschools and primary schools for SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission, 21 August 2020***

**Date:** Friday 11 September, 2020

**Source:** Public Health England for (PHE) for the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

**Document type:** Research

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** Paper by Shamez Ladhani on prospective active national surveillance of preschools and primary schools for SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in England. It was brought to SAGE's 53rd meeting on COVID-19 on 27 August 2020 as a paper for interest.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-prospective-active-national-surveillance-of-preschools-and-primary-schools-for-sars-cov-2-infection-and-transmission-21-august-2020?utm\\_source=ce694b15-4571-461c-b639-f8a3c83636dc&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-prospective-active-national-surveillance-of-preschools-and-primary-schools-for-sars-cov-2-infection-and-transmission-21-august-2020?utm_source=ce694b15-4571-461c-b639-f8a3c83636dc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

***UK Government Invests in COVID Research at St Andrews University***

**Date:** Friday 11 September, 2020

**Source:** Scotland Office

**Document type:** Press release

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** The UK Government is investing £270,000 in research at the University of St Andrews. A team of physicists and virologists at the university are testing different surfaces and coatings for their effectiveness in killing the COVID-19 virus.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-invests-in-covid-research-at-st-andrews-university?utm\\_source=12a56a03-ac38-42a7-805b-e26cd23b83b4&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-invests-in-covid-research-at-st-andrews-university?utm_source=12a56a03-ac38-42a7-805b-e26cd23b83b4&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

***COVID-19 Education Recovery Group: Children and young people infographic***

**Date:** Friday 11 September, 2020

**Source:** Scottish Government Learning Directorate

**Document type:** Transparency data

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** Infographics providing a weekly snapshot of current COVID-related data in relation to children and young people, and their associated workforce, such as the number of tests and positive cases reported, and the attendance and absence of both children and staff in childcare and school settings.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-19-education-recovery-group-children-and-young-people-infographic/>

***Coronavirus (COVID-19): Universities, Colleges and Student Accommodation Providers***

**Date:** Friday 11 September, 2020

**Source:** Scottish Government Advanced Learning and Science Directorate

**Document type:** Advice and guidance

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** Guidance for higher and further education institutions and student accommodation providers to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. This guidance is for the college, university and student accommodation (including student associations, halls of residence and Purpose Built Student Accommodation Providers) sectors in Scotland. The following guidance applies from 1 September 2020 and replaces the guidance issued for colleges and universities on 29 June and the guidance issued for student accommodation providers on 22 July. It will be updated and renewed as circumstances change. It sets out both the Scottish Government's current advice and guidance for institutions and providers in helping to

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minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-universities-colleges-and-student-accommodation-providers/>

***Reducing Bureaucratic Burden: Higher Education***

**Date:** Thursday 10 September 2020

**Source:** Department for Education and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

**Document type:** Policy paper

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** The government's plans achieve significant reductions in bureaucracy for the research, innovation and university sectors. This policy paper follows announcements made on 4 May 2020 and June 2020.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-bureaucratic-burdens-higher-education?utm\\_source=d3df53bf-fb62-4a46-97c2-cd68daa4d3eb&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-bureaucratic-burdens-higher-education?utm_source=d3df53bf-fb62-4a46-97c2-cd68daa4d3eb&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

***Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues Minutes: 8 September 2020***

**Date:** Thursday 10 September, 2020

**Source:** Scottish Government Learning Directorate

**Document type:** Minutes

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** Minutes from the tenth meeting of the COVID-19 Advisory Group held on Tuesday 8 September 2020.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues-minutes-8-september-2020/>

***Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues: Advisory Note on Physical Education, Music and Drama in Schools***

**Date:** Thursday 10 September, 2020

**Source:** Scottish Government Learning Directorate

**Document type:** Advice and guidance

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** Advisory note from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues about physical education, music and drama in schools. There is an increased risk of transmission of COVID-19 during activities such as physical education, music (particularly singing and playing wind instruments) and drama (including school debating type activities) because of the respiratory aerosols which are exhaled during these activities and the close proximity of participants. The wearing of face coverings is usually not possible for these activities.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advisory-sub-group-on-education-and-childrens-issues-advice-on-physical-education-music-and-drama-in-schools/>

***Letter to Parents and Carers from the Chief Medical Officer – 10 September 2020***

**Date:** Thursday 10 September, 2020

**Source:** Northern Ireland Department of Education and Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland

**Document type:** Advice and guidance

**Geographical coverage:** Northern Ireland

**Details:** The Chief Medical Officer has written to all parents and carers to outline actions that should be taken by parents and carers if their children develop COVID-19 symptoms.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/letter-parents-and-carers-chief-medical-officer-10->

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***Public Health England Launches new Every Mind Matters Campaign***

**Date:** Wednesday 9 September 2020

**Source:** Public Health England

**Document type:** News release

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** Mental health campaign supports the wellbeing of children, young people and their parents. Most families have experienced upheaval in their daily lives during the pandemic. With children and young people now back at school or college, the new Public Health England (PHE) Better Health – Every Mind Matters campaign provides NHS-endorsed tips and advice to help children and young people's mental wellbeing, and equip parents and carers with the knowledge to support them.

Research reveals that the COVID-19 outbreak has caused an increase in anxiety in young people.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-health-england-launches-new-every-mind-matters-campaign?utm\\_source=18845a6d-6249-4315-a449-0f07dfb436b5&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-health-england-launches-new-every-mind-matters-campaign?utm_source=18845a6d-6249-4315-a449-0f07dfb436b5&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

***Educational Psychologists: Support for Coronavirus (COVID-19) Recovery***

**Date:** Wednesday 9 September 2020

**Source:** Department for Education

**Document type:** Guidance

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** The Department for Education wants to build temporary educational psychologist capacity in England to support schools and colleges returning in September. This guidance is for:

- former educational psychologists who may be interested in temporarily returning to the profession
- practising educational psychologists who may have additional capacity to offer support for a limited period

[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-psychologists-support-for-coronavirus-covid-19-recovery?utm\\_source=6de05d42-8a01-463a-8a04-69af465bae5a&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-psychologists-support-for-coronavirus-covid-19-recovery?utm_source=6de05d42-8a01-463a-8a04-69af465bae5a&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

***Financial Contingency Fund: Further Education and Open University Schemes 2020 to 2021***

**Date:** Tuesday 8 September 2020

**Source:** Department for Education

**Document type:** Legislation

**Geographical coverage:** Wales

**Details:** Funding to Further Education Institutions and the Open University to make emergency payments for students in crisis. This consists of two documents, one for further education and one for the OU.

<https://gov.wales/financial-contingency-fund-further-education-and-open-university-schemes-2020-2021>

***Vocational and Technical Qualification Assessments in 2021***

**Date:** Monday 7 September 2020

**Source:** Ofqual

**Document type:** News release

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** Ofqual confirms decisions following consultation on arrangements for vocational and technical qualification assessments in 2021. Ofqual has recognised that some learners taking vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) have experienced lost teaching and training time as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and that appropriate arrangements need to be put in place to mitigate the impact of

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this disruption and respond to any ongoing or future public health measures.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/vocational-and-technical-qualification-assessments-in-2021?utm\\_source=1bd748fa-d4b1-49fb-bcdb-32866fab66a2&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/vocational-and-technical-qualification-assessments-in-2021?utm_source=1bd748fa-d4b1-49fb-bcdb-32866fab66a2&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

***COVID-19 Education Recovery Group Minutes: 21 August 2020***

**Date:** Monday 7 September, 2020

**Source:** Scottish Government

**Document type:** Minutes

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** Minutes and papers from 21 August 2020 meeting of the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-19-education-recovery-group-minutes-21-august-2020/>

***Education Recovery Further Additional Funding 2020-2021: Local authority allocations***

**Date:** Monday 7 September, 2020

**Source:** Scottish Government Learning Directorate

**Document type:** Transparency data

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** Details of further additional funding allocations of £30 million for the recruitment of additional teachers showing allocations by the 32 local authorities.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/education-recovery-further-additional-funding-2020-2021-local-authority-allocations/>

***COVID-19 Education Recovery Group Minutes: 27 August 2020***

**Date:** Monday 7 September, 2020

**Source:** Scottish Government

**Document type:** Minutes

**Geographical coverage:** Scotland

**Details:** Minutes and papers from 27 August 2020 meeting of the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-19-education-recovery-group-minutes-27-august-2020/>



## Consultations published last week

There were no consultations on education or training published last week, but there was one consultation outcome.

### *Decisions on Arrangements for the Assessment and Awarding Vocational and Technical and Other General Qualifications in 2020 to 2021 Consultation: The Extended Extraordinary Regulatory Framework*

Given the high level of agreement with the arrangements proposed in Ofqual's first consultation on this subject, it has decided to implement them in full, as set out below:

- To enable awarding organisations to assist with mitigating the impact of disruption to teaching, learning and assessment, and any ongoing disruption to or restrictions on the delivery of assessments, through the adaptation of qualifications and assessments.
- To introduce a second version of the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF), the Extended ERF, to reflect this approach to mitigation and adaptation. The Extended ERF will apply to all qualifications except AS, A levels, GCSEs, and apprenticeship end-point assessments.
- To make no provision in the Extended ERF for the issue of calculated results which we introduced specifically in relation to the cancellation of assessments in the summer of 2020.
- To retain the ERF issued in May for 2 specific purposes only – to enable eligible learners who did not receive a calculated result this summer to receive their calculated result and to permit appeals for qualifications awarded under the Summer ERF. Ofqual will clarify in its second consultation how the ERF, alongside the Extended ERF, will cover assessments taken in autumn 2020.
- In light of the diversity of the VTQ landscape, not to prescribe a single approach to adaptation but to issue statutory guidance to inform awarding organisations' decisions and to support the development of consistent approaches.
- To work with awarding organisations to develop consistent approaches for qualifications which signal similar knowledge, understanding and skills, or practical competence, and have the same assessment approaches and delivery context, or have the same qualification type, for example Performance Table qualifications.
- To include within Ofqual's statutory guidance some specific guidance on the application of Special Consideration in the context of 2020 to 2021 and the ongoing impact of the pandemic.
- To permit awarding organisations to adapt qualifications and assessments taken in international markets, where this is necessary, provided that this does not undermine the validity of the qualifications, and risks around malpractice and the particular needs of the international market are considered and addressed.
- That certificates are issued (where appropriate) as normal, with no reference to a result having being determined under the arrangements in the Extended ERF.
- Not to supplement General Condition I1 (Appeals process) with any additional guidance around appeals in 2020 to 2021.
- To require awarding organisations to maintain records of the decisions they have made when adapting assessments and qualifications in compliance with our requirements and guidance, and to make those available to us on request.
- To require awarding organisations to have regard to any advice that Ofqual provides in writing, in the form of a Technical Advice Notice.

**Reference:** Ofqual/20/6679/1. **Department or agency:** Ofqual

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Document type:** Consultation outcome and guidance documents.

**This consultation response published:** Monday 7 September, 2020

**The original consultation** ran from 3 to 14 August 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-assessment-and-awarding-of-vocational-technical-and-other-general-qualifications-in-2020-to-2021>

## Policy papers published last week

### *Package of Support for Students Who Have to Defer their Studies*

**Author:** -

**Source:** Department for Education

**Document type:** Policy paper

**Published:** Friday 11 September, 2020

**Reference:** -

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Description:** Details on a range of opportunities to gain new skills, undertake work placements, additional learning and career development support. This document is for students who had planned to start higher education this year but who have had to defer until next year.

The package of support provides opportunities to:

- gain new skills
- undertake work placements in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- undertake additional learning
- get career development support

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/package-of-support-for-students-who-have-to-defer-their-studies>

### *Reducing Bureaucratic Burden: Higher Education*

**Author:** -

**Source:** Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

**Document type:** Policy paper

**Published:** Thursday 10 September, 2020

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Description:** The government's plans to achieve significant reductions in bureaucracy for the research, innovation and university sectors are outlined in this policy paper. It follows announcements made on 4 May 2020 and June 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-bureaucratic-burdens-higher-education>

### *Coronavirus and Schools*

**Author:** Nerys Roberts and Shadi Donechi

**Source:** House of Commons Library

**Document type:** House of Commons Research Briefing

**Published:** Friday 11 September, 2020

**Reference:** CBP-8915

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Description:** The paper addresses:

- Exam results in summer 2020 and appeal arrangements.
- The phased re-opening of schools to more pupils, in England, including what schools are expected to do in the autumn term.
- The approach being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Historical data on school attendance during the lockdown in England.
- Research on home learning environments and how children and young people in different circumstances may be affected by the school closures. This is a fast-moving issue and the briefing should be

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*(Continued from page 62.)*

read as correct at the time of publication. It is an update of a previously published research note.  
<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8915/>

### ***Apprenticeships and Skills Policy in England***

**Author:** Andy Powell

**Source:** House of Commons Library

**Document type:** House of Commons Research Briefing

**Published:** Monday 7 September, 2020

**Reference:** SN 03052

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Description:** This note provides a summary of apprenticeships and skills policy and developments in England. It covers policy developments from 2015 onwards, including the introduction of the apprenticeship levy and other funding changes in May 2017.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn03052/>

### ***Opposition Day Debate: “The personal role and involvement of the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education in this summer’s exams fiasco”***

**Authors:** Nerys Roberts, Philip Loft, Robert Long and Susan Hubble

**Source:** House of Commons Library

**Document type:** House of Commons Debate Pack

**Published:** Monday 7 September, 2020

**Reference:** CDP-2020-0085

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Description:** On Wednesday 9 September 2020, there will be an Opposition Day Debate on the subject of “The personal role and involvement of the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Education in this summer’s exams fiasco”. The Commons Library has produced a debate pack of documents for the debate.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2020-0085/>

### ***Coronavirus: Financial Impact on Higher Education***

**Authors:** Paul Bolton and Susan Hubble

**Source:** House of Commons Library

**Document type:** House of Commons Research Briefing

**Published:** Tuesday 1 September, 2020

**Reference:** CBP 8954

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Description:** Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic there have been concerns about the financial impact on universities. Much of this has focussed on the potential loss of international students, but there could also be losses in income from lower home student numbers, a drop in research work and less revenue from accommodation, catering and conferencing. What are the size of these impacts and what has the Government done to support the sector?

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8954/>

### ***Education at a Glance 2020***

**Source:** OECD

**Document type:** Annual research report

**Published:** Tuesday 8 September, 2020

**Geographical coverage:** Global/OECD member states and partners

**Description:** The OECD’s annual report on the state of the world’s education, focusing mainly on OECD member states and partners. This year’s issue has a focus on vocational education as well as the inevitable consequences of COVID-19 on education.

[www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

## Statutory instruments issued last week

### *The Early Years Foundation Stage (Learning and Development and Welfare Requirements) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020*

**Year and number:** 2020/939

**Enabling power:** Childcare Act 2006, ss. 39 (1), 42 (1) to (3A), 43 (1), 44 (1) to (4), 104 (2).

**Issued:** 09.09.2020.

**Sifted:** -.

**Made:** 02.09.2020.

**Laid:** 04.09.2020.

**Coming into force:** 26.09.2020.

**Effect:** S.I. 2007/1772; 2012/938 amended.

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Classification:** General.

**Price of print edition:** £4.90. (The electronic edition is free.)

**ISBN:** 9780348211474.

**Details:** These Regulations make amendments to the Early Years Foundation Stage (Learning and Development Requirements) Order 2007 (“the 2007 Order”) and the Early Years Foundation Stage (Welfare Requirements) Regulations 2012 (“the 2012 Regulations”) which modify and disapply certain requirements imposed under the 2007 Order and the 2012 Regulations.

The amendments are made to assist early years providers during the period of any prohibitions, restrictions or requirements imposed by regulations or a direction, in order to control the transmission or incidence of coronavirus, which impact upon a provider’s ability to comply with certain requirements under the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (“the Document”). The Document was published by the Secretary of State for Education on 3rd March 2017 on the gov.uk website(1). There is a duty on the Secretary of State to keep the operation of the amendments under review.

Part 1 contains general provisions.

Part 2 amends the 2007 Order to allow the current disapplications (2) under the 2007 Order to take effect where prohibitions, restrictions or requirements relating to coronavirus are imposed by regulations or a direction, to control the spread of the virus and it is not reasonably practicable for a provider to comply with the prescribed requirements in regulation 4 of these Regulations.

Instead, the learning and development requirements are to be treated as discharged, if a provider uses its reasonable endeavours to discharge those requirements and the requirement to undertake progress checks at age 2, is disappplied.

Similarly Part 3 modifies and disapplies some provisions in the 2012 Regulations relating to safeguarding and welfare requirements where prohibitions, restrictions or requirements relating to coronavirus are imposed by regulations or a direction, to control the spread of the virus and it is not reasonably practicable for a provider to comply with the prescribed requirements in regulation 5 of these Regulations.

Paragraphs (3) and (4) of new regulation 3B in the 2007 Order and 3B in the 2012 Regulations, enable some of the modifications to be treated as discharged for a further 14 day period following the cessation of the relevant legislation for providers who have and will continue to meet certain requirements.

An impact assessment has not been produced for this instrument as no, or no significant, impact on the private or voluntary sector is foreseen.

*(Continued on page 65.)*

***The Education (Student Support) (Postgraduate Master's Degrees) (Wales) (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020***

**Year and number:** 2020/918 (W.206)

**Enabling power:** Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998, ss. 22 (2) (a), 42 (6).

**Issued:** 11.09.2020.

**Sifted:** -.

**Made:** 28.08.2020 @9.20 am.

**Laid before Senedd Cymru:** 28.08.2020 @3.00 pm.

**Coming into force:** 01.09.2020.

**Effect:** S.I. 2019/895 (W. 161) amended.

**Geographical coverage:** Wales.

**Classification:** General.

**Price of print edition:** £4.90. (The electronic edition is free.)

**ISBN:** 9780348206104.

**Details:** These Regulations are made under the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 and they amend the Education (Student Support) (Postgraduate Master's Degrees) (Wales) Regulations 2019 ("the 2019 Regulations").

The 2019 Regulations provide for financial support for eligible students taking postgraduate master's degree courses which begin on or after 1 August 2019.

Regulation 2 amends regulation 10(1) of the 2019 Regulations (eligible students – exceptions), to remove the requirement for a student undertaking a distance learning course to be in Wales on the first day of the first academic year of that course, in cases where the absence relates to coronavirus.

The Welsh Ministers' Code of Practice on the carrying out of Regulatory Impact Assessments was considered in relation to these Regulations. As a result a regulatory impact assessment has been prepared as to the likely costs and benefits of complying with these Regulations. A copy can be obtained from the Higher Education Division, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ.



## Education Committee holds round table on further education

**L**ast Tuesday (8 September) the Education Select Committee held a round table on further education. The Committee asked sector stakeholders about the upcoming further education White Paper and what should be included in it. The Secretary of State indicated during his appearance before the Committee in April that the White Paper will form “one of the key elements” of the Government’s response to the Augar Review, which made recommendations on post-18 education and funding. The review called for more attention to be paid to the 50 per cent of young people who do not attend higher education.

The roundtable also touched on reforms to qualifications and the benefits of a ‘German style’ FE system, the proposal to bring colleges back into public ownership, and post-16 funding. The Committee took evidence from Jane Hickie, Managing Director of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers; David Hughes, CEO of the Association of Colleges; Bill Watkin, Chief Executive of the Sixth Form College Association; David Robinson, Director for Post-16 and Skills of the Education Policy Institute; Kirstie Donnelly, Chief Executive of City & Guilds; and Stephen Evans, Chief Executive of the Learning and Work Institute.

This Wednesday (16 September) the Education Select Committee will meet and take evidence for an accountability session from Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE, MP, Secretary of State for Education. He will be supported by Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education, and Michelle Dyson, Director for Qualifications, Curriculum and Extra-Curricular, Department for Education. The Committee will want to question witnesses about the summer examination results fiasco on which the Labour Party used one of its Opposition Days, when it gets to choose what is debated, to raise the issue again.

Down at the other end of the Palace of Westminster the Public Services Committee has been holding a series of meetings taking evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on the public services. Its findings should be one of the more interesting select committee reports to be published since the last election. The committee has already taken evidence from countries as far away as Taiwan and New Zealand, and from academic experts at home. This Wednesday it will take evidence from social workers working with children, working age health and social care users, addiction and mental health service users and older peoples’ service users.



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## Education and Children Issues

In the first session of oral parliamentary questions since the summer recess, inevitably COVID-19 and its various ramifications dominated. (House of Commons, oral questions to the Department for Education, 7 September 2020.) Within this, there was quite a wide range of COVID-related issues covered, from adult education, further education, higher education and, of course, the exams fiasco.

### Free Speech: Universities

Felicity Buchan (Con, Kensington) asked the Secretary of State what steps his Department was taking to help ensure free speech in universities. The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that his Department was exploring a range of legislative and non-legislative options.

### University Student Numbers

Virendra Sharma (Lab, Ealing, Southall) and Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Lab, Slough) asked the Secretary of State what steps the Government was taking to support universities accepting higher numbers of domestic students as a result of the recent policy change on predicted A-level grades. Holly Mumby-Croft (Con, Scunthorpe) asked what steps the Department was taking to help universities increase the number of places available to students in 2020-21. The Minister for Universities, Michelle Donelan (Con, Chippenham) said that the higher education taskforce would ensure that the vast majority of students who wanted to go to university could do so.

Mr Sharma asked the minister to confirm that additional support would be granted to ensure that the Secretary of State's algorithm would not cost thousands of students their futures. Michelle Donelan said that the Government had recently announced a £10 million capital fund to cover capital as well as equipment. Mr Dhesi asked what extra provision the Government would make to ensure that universities could properly support students who faced hardship. Michelle Donelan said that her department had encouraged the Office for Students to be more flexible.

Holly Mumby-Croft urged the minister to ensure that students who had been affected by administrative errors made by their schools would not be denied their place at university. Michelle Donelan said that she had agreed with all universities that all students, including those successful on appeal, with the required grades would be offered a place at their first-choice university and that deferred places would be offered only as a last resort.

Emma Hardy (Lab, Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) said that she shared the serious concerns of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies that the annual mass migration of millions of students to university would make significant outbreaks of COVID-19 "highly likely". She asked when universities and communities would receive the updated guidance on safe reopening that had been promised in a DfE press release on the previous Friday evening. Michelle Donelan said that SAGE had published its updated guidance the previous Friday, and the Government would issue updated guidance during the week to supplement its original guidance of several months ago.

### School Exercise: COVID-19

Alison McGovern (Lab, Wirral South) asked the Secretary of State what steps the Government was taking to prioritise access to exercise in schools as part of catch-up education as COVID-19 restrictions were eased. The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that the Department's guidance included information on how schools could provide physical education and opportunities for pupils to be active, including links to detailed advice from the subject organisations. Alison McGovern urged the Secretary of State to put on record what he would do to increase funding support to make sure that children were physically active at school. Gavin Williamson said that the Government would be providing £320 million to ensure that there were sports activities in all schools.

*(Continued on page 68.)*

### **Home Education: Grades/COVID-19**

Mark Pawsey (Con, Rugby) asked the Minister what steps his Department was taking to allocate grades to home-educated students who had been unable to take public examinations as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Minister for School Standards, Nick Gibb (Con, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) said that schools and colleges that had accepted entries from private candidates, including home-educated students, in the summer should enter those who wished to sit an exam, and there should be no financial barriers to doing so. Mr Pawsey asked the minister what advice he could give to young people who needed grades to recognise the work they had undertaken. Nick Gibb said that private candidates who had been entered for the summer series or where their school had intended to enter them for the summer would be eligible to enter the autumn series.

The chairman of the Select Committee, Robert Halfon (Con, Harlow) pointed out that many thousands of private candidates, including mature students and those undertaking resits, had been left without a grade under the current year's exam arrangements and they had been unable to progress to the next stage of their education or employment. He asked the minister to ensure that UCAS predicted grades had been confirmed for all external candidates, to provide them with the option to sit autumn exams free of charge, ensure that the highest grade of the UCAS result and autumn resit would be awarded, and urge universities to honour their offers for a September 2021 start date. Mr Halfon also asked the Secretary of State whether he would allow external candidates who had received a centre-assessed grade to appeal their results. Nick Gibb said that universities were being flexible on entry to universities this year and schools and further education colleges were able to provide additional support to students sitting their exams in the autumn if they had the capacity to do so. The minister pointed out that schools could also use their pupil premium funding to support such pupils. He stressed that the autumn exams would be an important backstop to the summer grade process, and the Government was helping schools to offer them to students by assisting with additional space and invigilators, where required.

### **Further Education College Finances**

Gill Furniss (Lab, Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) asked the Minister what recent assessment she had made of the adequacy of further education college finances. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Keegan (Con, Chichester) said that colleges were facing financial uncertainty as a result of COVID-19 and many had faced reductions in commercial income and uncertainty with apprenticeship starts. The Education Department had a team, which including skilled finance professionals, who were working closely to support colleges, and the DfE was also working with banks to ensure access to commercial lending where required.

Gill Furniss urged the minister to continue with the necessary funding, which, according to the Sixth Form Colleges Association, should be £4,760 per year for each 16 to 17-year-old and 18-year-old. Gillian Keegan said that the Government would continue to pay the grant funding and monthly payments for 2019-20, and they would do so for 2020-21. She pointed out that the Government had also provided catch-up funding of £96 million for small group tutoring for disadvantaged students who needed it. The minister said that £200 million had also been allocated to enable FE colleges to improve their buildings. She added that a team of officials were working with every college that needed that support.

Toby Perkins (Lab, Chesterfield) referred to the Government's commissioner for further education who had warned that 40 colleges were currently at risk of running out of cash, and the Association of Colleges had warned of a £2 billion cash shortfall. Gillian Keegan said that the Government had provided grant funding to the FE sector of more than £3 billion for a full year, and it had also announced an increase of funding of £400 million for 2020-21, which was an increase of 7% in overall funding.

### **Testing, Marking and Examination Systems**

Barry Sheerman (Lab/Co-op, Huddersfield) asked the Minister to make an assessment of the adequacy of testing, marking and examination systems. The Minister for School Standards, Nick Gibb (Con, Bognor Regis

*(Continued from page 68.)*

and Littlehampton) said that exams were the best and fairest way of judging students' performance, and following the difficulties experienced with awarding grades this summer, the Government was determined that exams should go ahead next year. He added that the Government, working with Ofqual, the exams boards and other stakeholders would consider the approach to ensure that they would be fair.

Mr Sheerman argued that there was no point on trying to blame Ofqual and Ofsted, as the responsibility lay in the instability and lack of firm leadership in the Department for Education. Nick Gibb insisted that the model that had been used to ensure students were able to get qualifications, notwithstanding the fact that exams had been cancelled because of the pandemic, had been supported in a wide-ranging consultation by the regulator. He added that it had been supported by 89% of respondents, and a similar model had been used in all four nations of the United Kingdom.

The Shadow Education Secretary, Kate Green (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) argued that the Secretary of State had repeatedly been warned of the dangers of the system of calculated grades and the flawed standardisation methodology he adopted, by a former senior official of the Department, the regulator and what had happened in Scotland. Nick Gibb insisted that the warnings had not been ignored as all the various challenges that had been made by individuals, had been raised with Ofqual. But he added that the Department had been assured by the regulator that overall, the model was fair.

### **Adult Education: Unemployed People**

Seema Malhotra (Lab/Co-op, Feltham and Heston) asked the Minister what recent assessment she had made of trends in the number of unemployed people who were accessing adult education. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Keegan (Con, Chichester) said that the latest figures had shown that between August 2019 and April 2020 over 195,000 learners, out of a total of 1,624,000 further education learners over 19, had benefited from support for the unemployed. She added that the Government was supporting people by investing £1.34 billion in 2020-21 in adult education and £2.5 billion over the course of the Parliament in the National Skills Fund.

Seema Malhotra cited the Centre for Ageing Better, which had revealed that the number of older workers on unemployment-related benefits had more than doubled to over 600,000 in July. She argued that the core adult education budget remained frozen in cash terms at last year's amount, and those recently unemployed or redundant, who wanted to access training or retraining to upskill often could not afford to, as they could lose universal credit if they did so. Gillian Keegan said that the Chancellor's plan for jobs to give businesses confidence to retain, hire and get careers back on track, included £1.6 billion of scale-up employment training support and apprenticeships.

### **Early Years Providers: COVID-19**

Karen Buck (Lab, Westminster North) asked the minister what steps she was taking to ensure the financial stability of early years providers during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Vicky Ford (Con, Chelmsford) said that early years providers would continue to benefit from the £3.6 billion investment in the provision this financial year. She added that the Government had also announced supplementary funding of up to £23 million for maintained nursery schools, which often cared for higher numbers of disadvantaged pupils. Ms Buck argued that there was already a £660 million gap in early years funding. Vicky Ford said that any parent who may be struggling to find early years provision should contact their local authority.

### **School Finances: COVID-19**

Chi Onwurah (Lab, Newcastle upon Tyne Central) asked the Minister what recent discussions he had had with school leaders on providing financial support for costs incurred during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Minister for School Standards, Nick Gibb (Con, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) said that schools had been able to claim funds to meet certain additional costs and the Government was providing £1 billion in catch-up funding.

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*(Continued from page 69.)*

Chi Onwurah said that being COVID secure had cost schools tens of thousands of pounds, following years of budget cuts. Nick Gibb pointed out that schools had been able to claim for unavoidable costs incurred between March and July caused by the pandemic that could not be met from the school's existing resources, up to £75,000, depending on the size of the school.

Margaret Greenwood (Lab, Wirral West) asked the minister what steps the Government would take to ensure that all schools could be reimbursed for COVID-related costs, as headteachers were having to weigh up pupil safety against financial stability. Nick Gibb argued that the generous three-year settlement for schools was the best funding settlement in 10 years, with £14.4 billion over three years. He said that schools in financial difficulties could approach their local authority and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, which would provide support for schools that were experiencing difficulties, including the deployment of school resource management advisers.

### **School Safety: COVID-19**

Matt Western (Lab, Warwick and Leamington), Taiwo Owatemi (Lab, Coventry North West) and Paul Howell (Con, Sedgefield) asked what steps he had taken to ensure that schools would be safe for children as they returned to the classroom following the COVID-19 outbreak. The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that if schools implemented the actions set out in the system of controls in the Government's guidance, they would reduce risks in their schools and create an inherently safer environment for all to operate in.

Matt Western said that in the last week, there had been 46 cases of COVID-19 in schools across the UK and 86 cases in Scotland. He added that a total of 158 schools already had cases. Gavin Williamson insisted that at every stage, working right across the sector, there had been the strictest level of controls and a system of controls, to create a safe environment for not just the children and those who worked in schools but the community as a whole.

Taiwo Owatemi asked what allowances or provisions the Government had given schools to keep students with pre-existing medical conditions safe. Gavin Williamson stressed that every precautionary measure that could be taken had been taken to ensure that the needs of children of all ages, including those who suffered disabilities, would be properly catered for.

Paul Howell warned that the current approach to safety within school transport had been driving excessive costs for coach operators and, by extension, local authorities. He added that while he endorsed the need for accessible transport, the Department must make it more fit for purpose for school transport. Gavin Williamson said that the issue had raised concern for many MPs. He added that although the Department for Transport's decision to delay the implementation of the regulations had been a positive move, he would ask a minister in the DfT to meet Mr Howell.

### **School Support: Increased COVID-19 Infection Areas**

Bill Esterson (Lab, Sefton Central) asked the Secretary of State what steps his Department was taking to support schools in areas with an increase in COVID-19 infection levels. The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that in exceptional circumstances in which some level of restriction to education or childcare was required in a local area, local and national partners would carefully consider the most appropriate actions, with the aim of retaining as much face-to-face education as possible.

Bill Esterson asked whether all children who had to study from home would have access to broadband. He also asked what had happened to the laptops that had been promised months ago. Gavin Williamson said that more than 200,000 laptops had been distributed, as well as more than 40,000 internet router connections, for children from the most disadvantaged communities. He added that the Government had invested in a further 150,000 laptops, which would be provided for communities that were not able to provide face-to-face teaching within schools.

*(Continued on page 71.)*



### **Attainment Gap: Disadvantaged/Affluent Areas**

Scott Benton (Con, Blackpool South) and Nigel Mills (Con, Amber Valley) asked the Secretary of State what steps his Department was taking to close the attainment gap between students from disadvantaged and affluent areas. The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that in addition to the pupil premium, the £350 million national tutoring programme would provide affordable, high-quality tuition to disadvantaged pupils in schools and colleges. He added that the catch-up premium would provide a further £650 million to schools to make up for the lost teaching time of all pupils. Scott Benton argued that the recent data which had highlighted the learning gap between rich and poor secondary-age pupils, had demonstrated that the disparity was wider in Blackpool than in any other part of the country. Gavin Williamson said that the Government had already invested £6 million in the Blackpool opportunity area, and another almost £2 million would also be invested in the Blackpool opportunity area, on top of all the extra investment that was being made in terms of schools and the COVID catch-up fund. Nigel Mills argued that the key to tackling the issue was to start early and finding a way to provide a long-term sustainable funding settlement. Gavin Williamson said that it was “absolutely right” to highlight the important role that early action and early support played in children’s lives.

### **Missed Education: COVID-19**

Andrew Jones (Con, Harrogate and Knaresborough) and Chris Skidmore (Con, Kingswood) asked the Secretary of State what steps his Department was taking to help children and young people catch up on the education they had missed during the previous school year as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that the Government had announced a catch-up package worth £1 billion, including a catch-up premium worth a total of £650 million, to support schools to make up for lost teaching time. He added that in addition, the national tutoring programme had been targeted at those children who were most disadvantaged.

Andrew Jones said that as the amount of catch-up needed was individual and diverse, it was challenging for both families and teachers. Gavin Williamson said that the Education Endowment Foundation had undertaken evidence-based work to ensure that, while schools would make the assessment of the individual needs of children and what help and intervention could be put in place for them, there was guidance on what worked in the classroom environment. He added that that might mean extending the school day for some; or it might mean Saturday classes for others.

Chris Skidmore said that South Gloucestershire Council had been the first in the country to implement a recovery curriculum to support schools, by working with experts from a range of fields and taking in international examples to get children back into the classroom. Gavin Williamson said he would be delighted to look at the work that the South Gloucestershire Council had undertaken.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: COVID-19**

Rob Butler (Con, Aylesbury) asked the minister what her Department was doing to support children with special educational needs and disabilities in returning to school as COVID-19 restrictions were eased. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Vicky Ford (Con, Chelmsford) said that her Department had published a range of guidance to support children, families, carers and educational settings. She added that the Government had also increased high-needs funding by £730 million next year on top of the current year’s £780 million.

Rob Butler argued that special schools for physically disabled children had faced especial challenges over the past few months. Vicky Ford said that for those who needed tailored support, specialist therapists, clinicians and other support staff could attend school sites to provide interventions as usual. She added that in terms of the £1 billion of catch-up funding, three times more would be going into special schools than into mainstream schools.

Tulip Siddiq (Lab, Hampstead and Kilburn) pointed out that the Children’s Commissioner for England had warned that Government guidance on school exclusion could encourage a zero-tolerance approach to

challenging behaviour that may result in children with SEND who were struggling to readjust being excluded in large numbers. Vicky Ford said that she had covered the point in her open letter the previous week to all children with SEND and their families. She added that off-rolling was never acceptable and it would be monitored by Ofsted.

### **Topical Questions**

Felicity Buchan (Con, Kensington) asked the Secretary of State what support his Department was giving to universities and schools to help them recruit foreign students. The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that universities and schools were being supported with a campaign to attract more students to the UK and working across Government to make sure that students applying for visas could do so with ease. He added that the Home Office had been “incredibly supportive” in ensuring that for those who wanted to come and study, it had been a positive experience.

Kevin Brennan (Lab, Cardiff West) asked the Secretary of State whether he had heard any reports from schools about making face masks part of school uniform, including school uniform requirements about the type of face masks that were worn. Gavin Williamson said that Government advice issued to schools must be properly considered by all schools.

Cheryl Gillan (Con, Chesham and Amersham) asked the Secretary of State to reassure students and their families that universities were safe to open on the basis of blended learning and confirm that strategies and additional support would support the mental health of students when they returned to university. Gavin Williamson said that the Government had worked closely with not just the school sectors but the university sector to ensure that the return would be undertaken in a safe, cautious and planned way. He added that as the Government had recognised that COVID-19 had presented some challenging mental health problems to many young people as well as staff, a £9 million fund had been announced to support additional enhanced mental health work to support those who worked in and those who benefitted from being in the education sector, students included.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lab, Lewisham, Deptford) pointed out that on 2 July, she had asked the Secretary of State to write to her to confirm what extra practical support was being provided to disabled pupils, such as laptops and other assistive technology. She added that as of yet, she had not received a response. Gavin Williamson apologised for the non-arrival of the letter.

Robbie Moore (Con, Keighley) asked the minister what additional support could be provided to ensure high-quality provision across all schools for young people with Special Educational Needs. The Minister for School Standards, Nick Gibb (Con, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) said that the National Association for Special Educational Needs, on behalf of the Whole School SEND Consortium, had been funded to recruit teachers to deliver high-quality teaching across all types of special educational needs, which was available to all schools. He pointed out that the Government had also funded targeted support, which focused on particular areas of concern that had been flagged by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. Mr Gibb added that the Government would be putting £730 million into high needs the following year, on top of £780 million of additional funding in the current year, which meant that high needs funding would have increased by 24% in two years.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Lab, Slough) said that many parents, particularly those who had been shielding and those living in multigenerational households or who had children with special educational needs or disabilities, remained concerned about sending their children back to school. Nick Gibb said that through an open letter, guidance had been given to schools. Chi Onwurah (Lab, Newcastle upon Tyne Central) asked the Secretary of State to confirm that he recognised that algorithms were neither biology nor astrology but complex data manipulation tools, which did what they were told to do, which could not predict the performance of individuals, and which required a robust regulatory framework before being used in the public or private sector. Gavin Williamson said that he very much agreed that there needed to be a robust regulatory framework in terms of any use of algorithms. He added that algorithms were used every single year in the management of grade boundaries. Afzal Khan (Lab, Manchester Gorton) pointed out that about 20,000 private or home-schooled students who would normally have taken A-level, AS-level and GCSE exams in the summer, had been excluded from the U-turn on the assessment algorithm and they were therefore still being penalised by the Government’s arbitrary and discriminatory policies. Exams and

# Exams and the role of Ministers

**M**ost of the time, of necessity, the Government controls what happens in Parliament, what is debated and when. Just occasionally, for a few days each month, the Opposition chooses the debates on what are known as Opposition Day Debates. Labour used one of these rare days when it commanded the agenda to raise again what it called the summer exams fiasco and the role of the Prime Minister and the Education Secretary. A major debate on education followed.

The Shadow Education Secretary, Kate Green (Lab, Stretford and Urmston) used an Opposition Day debate to attack the role of ministers in the awarding of qualifications exam fiasco. This was in the form of a motion asking for “all correspondence, including meeting notes, minutes, submissions and electronic communications, involving Ministers and Special Advisers pertaining to the process of awarding qualifications in GCSE, A-Level and NVQs in 2020 and 2021 by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education to the Education Select Committee.”

Ms Green said that the debate follows “a chaotic summer of distress and dismay for young people, their families and their teachers. The system for awarding examination grades that the Secretary of State for Education put in place left thousands of young people devastated. When they received their results, they felt that they had been robbed of the opportunities they deserved by a flawed algorithm that the Secretary of State had pushed for. As events unfolded, the scale of the Government’s incompetence became obvious. Less than two days before the A-level results, new grounds for appeal were announced, ones that Ofqual has since said were never going to be workable. On results day itself, the Prime Minister and Secretary of State insisted the system was robust, even as it was unravelling around them ... this shambles is no way to run a country.”

Right at the start of the debate Alun Cairns (Con, Vale of Glamorgan), who until his resignation last year had been Secretary of State for Wales, launched a predictable attempt to derail the Labour attack, pointing out that in Labour-run Wales the Welsh government there “took identical steps”. Kate Green did not have a defence for that, because it was true, and after a half-hearted reference to the Welsh keeping AS levels unlike the English, she quickly moved on attacking the Conservative government at Westminster for their “inability to govern competently”. She claimed it was also “about integrity and process. It is about what the Prime Minister knew, what the Secretary of State knew and when they knew it. It is about why, when faced with concerns about their chosen system, they did not do anything to address them. Our motion is not about scoring party political points, she said, rather unconvincingly, “most of all it is about transparent government and learning from the mistakes that were made this year so that they are not made again in future.”

Ms Green had detected “some inconsistency” between Ofqual’s version of events and statements that the Secretary of State made in the Commons. She wanted to know how the decision to cancel exams and use calculated grades was taken. Roger Taylor, chairman of Ofqual, had told the Education Select Committee that Ofqual first advised Ministers back in March that its preference was to hold socially distanced exams; failing that to delay exams; or, if necessary, to award a teacher certificate, rather than using a system of calculating grades. Roger Taylor had said: “It was the Secretary of State who then subsequently took the decision and announced, without further consultation with Ofqual, that exams were to be cancelled and a system of calculated grades was to be implemented.” She wanted to know whether Ofqual had put the system in place, or “was it done because of the Secretary of State’s decision? If so, he needs to take responsibility for the consequences, which he had been warned about. Ofqual said that as early as 16 March, it warned the Department for Education that, to quote its evidence to the Select Committee: ‘it would be challenging, if not impossible, to attempt to moderate estimates in a way that’s fair for all this year’s students. Everyone, throughout the process, was aware of the risks’.”

Ms Green claimed that a former senior official in the Department for Education, Sir Jon Coles, also met the Secretary of State weeks before results day to raise concerns about the approach adopted. “Will the Secretary of State tell the House when that meeting took place, what concerns were raised and what action he took as a result of it? The Minister for School Standards told the House on Monday that the problem was simply passed over to Ofqual to deal with, but does the Secretary of State accept that,

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ultimately, he is responsible for the chaos that followed?”

Ms Green said that Ofqual had told the Secretary of State that No. 10 was briefed before A-level results day—told about the risks to outlier students and to schools that were improving, and about the benefits to small cohorts such as independent school students. “So is it true that No. 10 was aware of these concerns well in advance of results being published, and if so, why did the Prime Minister fail to do anything about them? Time and again, it seems, both the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister were warned about injustices that the system would throw up but failed to address the problems. That is not to say that Ofqual was perfect, although the Secretary of State forced it into an impossible position. Ofqual must know that there are lessons to be learned and commit to learning them. That is why it is reassuring to see it commit to releasing all the data used in the qualifications process this year to independent researchers. Will the Secretary of State today give a similar commitment?”

When asked about BTECs by Alex Sobel (Lab/Co-op, Leeds North West), who said that BTEC students had not received their grades until weeks after the A-level situation had been resolved, Kate Green agreed that BTEC students deserved some justice for their situation. She went on to claim that in his evidence to the Select Committee, Roger Taylor (Ofqual chairman) said that the decision to delay was taken by Ofqual. “Can the Secretary of State confirm who made the decision to award the CAGs? Did he do it or was it Ofqual? Is it right that Ofqual did not agree with the Secretary of State’s policy to allow appeals based on mock results, believing that that would not be credible?”

While Ms Green accepted that responsibility for decision making appears to have been complex and confused, “there is no confusion when it comes to who carried the can for the failure. In the aftermath of this fiasco, the chief regulator of Ofqual and the permanent secretary at the Department for Education were forced to resign—but in our democracy it is Ministers, not officials, who are accountable.” Of course the Secretary of State had not resigned.

### **Secretary of State**

The Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson (Con, South Staffordshire) said that the decision to close schools and colleges and cancel the summer exams because of the COVID-19 outbreak was not a decision that was taken lightly. It was taken only after serious discussions with a number of parties, including, in particular, the exam regulator, Ofqual.

Mr Williamson rejected the Opposition motion from the start. He said that policy could be made “only through open discussion between Ministers, their advisers and departmental officials. This motion

***“Mr Williamson rejected the Opposition motion from the start. He said that policy could be made ‘only through open discussion between Ministers, their advisers and departmental officials. This motion fundamentally undermines that. Officials must be able to give advice to Ministers in confidence.’”***

fundamentally undermines that. Officials must be able to give advice to Ministers in confidence.” He pointed out that he was appearing before the Select Committee on Education the following week, and that he would “commit now to working with its members to provide the information that they request wherever it is possible.”

In a written statement on 23 March, Williamson had explained that the process would be based on teacher judgments, but that other relevant data such as prior attainment would also be taken into account. On 31 March, he directed the regulator to work with the exam boards to

develop a process for providing calculated grades for 2020 and to hold an exam series as soon as reasonably possible after schools and colleges fully opened again. His letter stated that the grades submitted by centres should be standardised and that the national grade distribution should follow a similar pattern to previous years as far as possible. He also requested that students should have a right of



*(Continued from page 74.)*

appeal where there were errors in the process. He issued a second direction letter to Ofqual on 9 April regarding vocational and technical qualifications. From that point on, Ofqual began to develop a process for arriving at calculated grades.

At the beginning of April, Ofqual published a policy document on awarding grades for GCSEs and A and AS-levels, which was followed by a two-week public consultation, to which more than 12,700 responses were received.

On 22 May, Ofqual published its decisions. The key principle of using a statistical standardisation approach was supported by 89% of those who responded to Ofqual's consultation. "It is important to remember," the Secretary of State said, "that similar approaches to awarding qualifications following the cancellation of exams were put in place in Scotland, which, as we are all aware, has an SNP Administration, in Wales, which, as we are all aware, has a Labour-Liberal Democrat Administration, and in Northern Ireland, which, as we are all aware, has a DUP-Sinn Féin Administration. All four nations reached the same policy conclusion about the best and fairest approach for awarding qualifications."

Between April and August, the detail of Ofqual's model for awarding grades without examinations was developed by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation and by other assessment experts in conjunction with it. It was vital that the model was seen to be fair, and ministers were reassured by Ofqual that it was. "We explored issues, including whether disadvantaged students and other groups such as black, Asian and minority ethnic students would be treated fairly by the model. Information on this was shared at the public symposium held by Ofqual on 21 July, which made it clear that the standardisation process was not biased."

After the publication of the Scottish results on 4 August, ministers again sought reassurance from Ofqual about the fairness of the model. The Department also rapidly considered a number of options to reduce the risk of a similar loss of public confidence happening in England.

Following discussions, the Secretary of State announced the triple lock system on 12 August. As happens every year, ministers did not have sight of the full details of A-level results at individual or school and college level ahead of their release on 13 August. Over the following days, it became clear that there were far too many inconsistent and unfair outcomes for students, and that it was not reasonable to expect these to be dealt with through an appeal system.

On 16 August, Ofqual's chairman and the chief regulator advised the Secretary of State that the Ofqual board was minded to make a formal decision to revert to centre assessment grades for all students, or the calculated grade where that was higher. The Secretary of State accepted their view and the decision was announced on Monday 17 August by Ofqual and the DfE. Subsequently, the Department worked closely with Ofqual and the exam boards to ensure that GCSE results were revised and issued on the original results day of 20 August, and A and AS-level results were reissued on the same timescale.

The majority of awarding organisations that deliver vocational and technical qualifications did not use similar processes as those for GCSEs and A-levels, and those results were issued as planned. However, there were delays to some results where a similar standardisation process had been used, to allow them to be reviewed and reissued.

On 17 August, the Government announced the removal of temporary student number controls, which had been introduced for the coming academic year. The Government also lifted the caps on domestic medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and teaching courses. The Government established the higher education taskforce to tackle some of the issues that it recognised would come about as a result of a higher level of grading due to centre assessment grades being awarded. Through the taskforce, the university sector has agreed to honour all offers to students who meet the conditions of their offer where possible. Looking to 2021, the Secretary of State said that the Department was working closely with Ofqual, the exam boards and groups representing teachers, schools and colleges to consider the best approach for exams and other assessments for next year. "I expect next year's exams to go ahead" Mr Williamson said.

## **Scotland**

In the debate that followed the two main front bench speeches, the first contribution came from the SNP.

*(Continued on page 76.)*



*(Continued from page 75.)*

David Linden (SNP, Glasgow East) said: “Let me be clear from the outset that I want to approach today’s debate with humility above anything else. Put simply, the grading of this year’s pupil qualifications is a plague on all our houses.” It was, of course, in Scotland, under the SNP, that the problem had first become public knowledge.

Mr Linden recalled that after the initial shock of the arrival of the pandemic, the lockdown and the closure of schools, colleges and universities, staff and students swiftly developed different ways of working facilitated by Zoom, Teams and Glow, although this had not been easy. “It has brought into sharp focus the

issue of digital exclusion,” Mr Linden said, “which has been highlighted to me by Derek Smeall, the principal of Glasgow Kelvin College in Easterhouse in my constituency.”

Some young people were able to continue their studies, albeit on a different platform, whereas others found themselves cut off from their support systems just at the point when that support was most needed as they prepared for state exams. Mr Linden thought that the decision to cancel the exams was “unquestionably the right thing to do, and I think we all agree on that.” This was not just about health, but because of the “massive inequality that would have been built into any exam results as a consequence of the difficulty in accessing the usual teacher support. Unfortunately, actions meant to tackle inequality ended up embedding it, and that has to be acknowledged and apologised for, and that is

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exactly what has happened in Scotland.”

Treading a fine line between the failures of the Secretary of State, acting for England, and the failures of his own party in Scotland, Mr Linden said: “There is no getting away from it: this has been a summer of confusion and distress for young people across the UK, who found themselves at the mercy of algorithms. However, it is not the use of the algorithm that is ultimately the problem; it is the litany of errors, ignored warnings, failures to act and missed opportunities for the Secretary of State to be proactive.”

In April, experts from the Royal Statistical Society offered to help with the modelling. Their offer was refused. At the start of July, a former director general at the Department for Education, Sir Jon Coles, wrote to the Secretary of State, warning that Ofqual’s grading system would lead to unfairness in the system. “His concerns were ignored.” On 10 July, the Education Committee warned about the algorithm, saying that it risked inaccuracy and bias against young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. “Still the irresponsibility continued.”

Putting the best spin on the fiasco in Scotland that his own party was responsible for, Mr Linden said: “When Scotland’s young people received their results on 4 August, it quickly became clear that something had gone wrong. Our Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills sat down and listened to the young people affected”.

### **Select Committee**

Robert Halfon (Con, Harlow), chairman of the Education Select Committee, said that his committee “would be going into what happened in a lot of detail.” He said he would focus his remarks on Ofqual. He thought that Ofqual’s statement had a “Charge of the Light Brigade mentality with its algorithm. It refused to publish the standardisation model in advance, despite the recommendation of our Select Committee. There

*(Continued on page 77.)*

should have been much more external scrutiny ... Ofqual should have taken proper advice from the Royal Statistical Society and people such as Sir Jon Coles.”

Mr Halfon’s second point was to ask whether Ofqual was fit for purpose and genuinely an independent body. “Clearly, what happened on the weekend of 15 and 16 August, on which the Select Committee will go into more detail next week, suggests significant blurred lines of accountability and questions about how independent the organisation is. Given the opposition even to partial reopening of schools and the lack of learning of millions of students, I understand why the Secretary of State said that the formal exams were not a viable option at the time, but we need to understand better what ingredients the Department for Education demanded in terms of the burnt algorithm pie.”

The committee chairman’s third point, given the clear need for lines of accountability and the blame game that has gone on, concerned Ofqual’s refusal to communicate during the Select Committee session. Halfon thought this was “incredible; everything was referred back to the DfE. That was unacceptable to parents and teachers. I think the BTEC was mishandled.”

***“Mr Halfon was particularly interested in BTEC, as a long-time champion of vocational education.”***

Mr Halfon was particularly interested in BTEC, as a long-time champion of vocational education. Some 450,000 students were affected by BTEC. “The way that all came out is very depressing”, Mr Halfon said. “As a country, we should value vocational qualifications as much as we do academic qualifications, and I just think that summed up everything that is wrong with our country in the way we look at these results. We need to learn the lessons from that.”

The rest of the back bench contributions that followed were a combination of repeating the attack lines of their front bench speakers mixed with local stories of hardship for students and praise for teachers. The Liberal Democrats, now with so few MPs, spoke well into the debate. Their new front bench spokesman on education, Daisy Cooper (LDP, St Albans), whose appointment was announced by tweet on 1 September in succession to Layla Moran, the defeated candidate for party leader, who was promoted to the Foreign Affairs and International Development spokesman, said: “The head of Ofqual made it clear that the grades fiasco was not entirely the fault of an algorithm; it was a conscious decision taken by the Secretary of State for Education. It is extraordinary that the Secretary of State is still ducking responsibility for this latest of shambles, which caused so many young people throughout the country serious distress last month.”

The debate was wound up by Nick Gibb (Con, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton), the Schools Standards Minister of State. He said that the Government had never wanted to cancel exams. Its “overriding aim was to ensure that all students received just recognition for their efforts and were able to progress to the next stage of their lives in the knowledge that their qualifications had the same value as previous years.”

The Minister claimed that the Department had “provided clear direction to Ofqual in the form of two direction letters, the first for general qualifications and the second for vocational and technical qualifications. We worked closely with Ofqual as it developed the process for arriving at calculated grades. As an independent body, the decisions throughout this process were rightly for Ofqual to take, but as the Secretary of State has already made clear, the Department was consulted throughout.” Gibb had met weekly with senior colleagues at Ofqual during the model development period, and whenever he was made aware of possible challenges with the model, he raised them with Ofqual, “seeking the necessary reassurances and urging Ofqual to consider appropriate changes to the arrangements—for example, an enhanced appeals process to help address our concerns about able candidates in schools with a track record of lower standards.”

When the vote was taken inevitably the Government, with its large 80 seat majority, won, by 237 MPs voting for the Opposition motion to 327 Tories voting against – a Government majority of 90.

# The Kickstart Scheme

**O**n Thursday 3 September 2020, in the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Thérèse Coffey (Con, Suffolk Coastal) had responded to an Urgent Question on the Kickstart scheme. This ministerial statement was repeated in the House of Lords on 7 September by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions, Baroness Stedman-Scott (Con). (House of Lords, Ministerial Statement, 7 September 2020.)

In the Commons Dr Coffey had said that because a lack of work experience could be a barrier to stepping on to the jobs ladder, through kick-start, employers would be supported to access a “massive” recruitment pool of young people who want to work and are “bursting with potential”. She pointed out that employers from all industries and across the private, public and voluntary sectors would be eligible if they could meet the simple criteria on the provision of roles.

In the Lords Baroness Stedman-Scott explained that the jobs secured through the Kickstart Scheme would go through a very rigorous process. She added that one of the major benefits of the new Kickstart Scheme was the involvement of the private sector. The minister stressed that the Government believed that the best chance for a sustained job would come from taking part in the scheme, as employers would have a chance to see if they could place participants permanently in their establishments.

Lord Taylor of Goss Moor (LDP) warned that small businesses were struggling to make sense of how they could access the scheme. He noted that the “poster child” was Tesco, which would get free members of staff. Baroness Stedman-Scott insisted that a range of companies wanted to take part in Kickstart, which included large companies, small companies and charities. She stressed that a rigorous process would ensure that the jobs were additional and not previously advertised.

Lord Bates (Con) asked the minister how she would ensure that the Kickstart programme supported the most vulnerable young people, who already faced the greatest barriers to employment. Baroness Stedman-Scott said that through the Kickstart Scheme, young people would have a work coach who would be with them throughout their journey. She pointed out that the young people would have full support from Jobcentre Plus and employer support and the HR teams would hopefully work with them.

The minister replied that young people would be taught how to put together a CV, understand the world of work and undertake training opportunities that would enhance their employment prospects. She said that the flexible support fund of £150 million would be deployed and, most importantly, when somebody was in a Kickstart placement, there would be regular reviews of their progress to ensure that no opportunity was missed to keep them in their placement.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth (CB) asked what plans the Government had for when the scheme ended. Baroness Stedman-Scott said that work coaches would continue to support claimants into work after their placements had been completed. She added that there were currently no plans to change the mechanism of the programme.

Lord McKenzie of Luton (Lab) questioned the minister about employers whose individual job needs did not amount to 30. He asked whether the number had been a DWP recommendation and whether there was a quality assurance process for recognition of intermediaries. He also asked who would have responsibility for delivering the various programmes.

Baroness Stedman-Scott said that where employers had robust HR teams and could manage the process, they would obviously be able to bid. But she pointed out that where employers had only one or two opportunities, the role of the intermediary would step in. The minister confirmed that there would be a quality assurance process for their procurement and she added that Movement to Work and the Prince’s Trust had been gearing up to fulfil the role.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con), a former Secretary of State for Scotland, asked the minister whether she would consider the ways in which small employers could engage directly, once the scheme was up and running. He also questioned whether there would be enough work coaches in place to maintain the scheme. Baroness Stedman-Scott said that as the Kickstart Scheme was implemented and progressed, it would be kept under constant review. She said that the number of work coaches would be doubled and young people would receive the support they would need to make a good transition from Kickstart to work.

# Science research funding in higher education

**L**ord Patel (CB, Life) introduced a debate on the Report from the Science and Technology Committee (Lords), *Science Research Funding in Universities* (4th Report, Session 2017–19, HL Paper 409). (House of Lords, Motion to Take Note, 9 September 2020.) This report was published in the last session of parliament. He pointed out that traditionally, the dual funding system for research had worked well but, over time, its flaws had begun to have a negative impact. Lord Patel explained that for example, quality-related, or QR, funding had stagnated and fallen by more than 12% since 2010 and at the same time there had been a decrease in the percentage of cost recovery for research from funding councils and charities.

He said that when the Science and Technology Committee (Lords) had looked at the recommendations of the Augar report in the context of research funding in universities, it had been surprised to hear that, in making its recommendations, the review had not considered the impact they would have on universities' ability to conduct science research. Lord Patel stressed that as the Government prepared its response to the Augar review as part of the spending review, it should be in no doubt that, if Augar recommendations were implemented, it would seriously affect the Government's ambition to make UK a science superpower. He said that stagnation in QR funding for over a decade, a decrease in full economic costs to 70% from funders and a shortfall in support funding from the Government in relation to charities' research grants would mean that universities would have to cross-subsidise costs, mainly from international student fees. Lord Patel pointed out that added to the ongoing funding issues, there was also the significant and unknown effect of COVID-19 on university finances and research.

Lord Patel pointed out that medical charities with a shortfall in their income had cut or cancelled 18% of their research funding, which amounted to hundreds of millions of pounds and the biggest threat to universities from the reduction in funding was a reduction in research talent. He warned that early-career researchers were particularly likely to be affected, as research students' funding was funded only to 45% of costs, which resulted in a £1.5 billion deficit. Lord Patel pointed out that cuts to charity research funding were likely to disadvantage early-career researchers such as PhD students, postdocs and research fellows. He added that COVID-19 would obviously have a significant effect, and no one knew for how long.

Turning to the Government's response, Lord Patel said that in some terms it had been positive and much appreciated, as far as it went. He pointed out that the Government had provided short-term funding of £100 million in QR-related funding and a research sustainability task force engaging with the university sector to discuss science research and issues had been most welcome. Lord Patel said that the £280 million sustaining university excellence fund was good, but the real question was how to plug billions of pounds-worth of shortfall.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Lord Callanan (Con) said that a joint BEIS-DfE ministerial taskforce on the sustainability of university research had been established, to identify and assess the risks and impacts of COVID-19 on universities and to consider approaches to help manage the risks. He added that a reprofiling of quality-related research funding in England had also provided £100 million as a short-term measure to help to safeguard university research and as a reassuring signal to the research sector. The minister added that £280 million of funding would sustain UKRI and national academy grant-funded research and fellowships affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lord Callanan said that from the autumn the Government would provide a package of grants and low-interest loans through the Sustaining University Research Expertise fund, or SURE, to cover up to 80% of a university's income losses from international students for the academic year 2020-21, up to the value of their non-publicly funded research activity. He pointed out that aim of the SURE fund was to help sustain the research capacity of the university research base as a whole and universities would be asked to demonstrate how they would use the funding to sustain research in areas typically funded by charities and business. The minister added that ultimately, the Government wanted critical university research capability, including charity-funded medical research, to be sustained and be able to contribute to future R&D ambitions.

The following written questions were answered in Parliament last week.

## House of Commons

### Department for Education

#### COVID-19 Education Catch-up Fund

**Lisa Cameron:** [77679] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 21 July 2020 to Question 72965, on Schools: Mental Health, whether schools will be able to use the £650 million catch-up premium for pastoral support for young people.

**Vicky Ford:** The £650 million 'catch-up premium' is to support schools to make up for lost teaching time. Our expectation is that this funding will be spent on the additional activities required to support children and young people to catch up after a period of disruption to their education.

To support settings to make best use of this funding, the Education Endowment Foundation have published a COVID-19 Support Guide for Schools with evidence-based approaches to catch-up for all students. Schools should use this document to help them direct their additional funding in the most effective way, which is available here: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/nationaltutoring-programme/covid-19-support-guide-for-schools/#nav-covid-19-support-guide-for-schools1>.

The guide is clear that evidence-based interventions, including those focused on tackling pupils' behaviour or social and emotional needs in order to support them with re-engaging with school, will support pupils to catch up as they return to school. The Education Endowment Foundation have also published a further School Planning Guide for the new academic year, which is available here: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/guide-to-supporting-schools-planning/>.

*Monday 7 September 2020*

#### Disabled Students' Allowances: Coronavirus

**Emma Lewell-Buck:** [81940] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for what reasons covid-19 cannot be cited as a reason to grant additional (a) study skills and (b) mentoring hours to higher education students that qualify for Disabled Students' Allowances.

**Michelle Donelan:** All students requiring a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) must undertake a Study Needs Assessment to ascertain the type and level of support that they require to access the teaching and learning provided by their higher education provider. Where a student's DSA support needs to change, for whatever reason, they should contact Student Finance England to request a DSA re-assessment. This can be for reasons related to COVID-19 or for any other reason.

*Monday 7 September 2020*



## Free School Meals: Voucher Schemes

**Cat Smith:** [82078] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the accessibility of the free school meal vouchers system for families who (a) do not have access to internet-enabled technology and (b) do not feel able to use that technology.

**Vicky Ford:** The government has taken unprecedented and substantial action to ensure that no child should go hungry as we take measures to tackle COVID-19, including in relation to free school meals. In the first instance, we asked schools to support eligible pupils by providing meals or food parcels through their existing food providers wherever possible. We also established a national voucher scheme to support schools and families where required.

Schools were best placed to decide how to support families eligible for free school meals in their areas, and this includes considerations over access to the internet. Where parents were not able to access the national voucher scheme, we recommended that the school print and post the voucher to families. If there were issues with postal deliveries, we advised schools to consider a safe collection point for families to collect their vouchers.

Monday 7 September 2020

## Universities: Finance

**Jonathan Gullis:** [82568] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what support his Department is providing to universities to help mitigate financial pressures as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

**Michelle Donelan:** The government has announced a package of measures which combines different ways to give further support to providers at this time of financial pressure. We have pulled forward an estimated £2.6 billion worth of forecast tuition fee payments to ease cashflow pressure this autumn.

We are also bringing forward quality-related research funding for higher education providers in England in the current academic year by £100 million. This is on top of the unprecedented package of support for businesses already announced by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and a range of business loan schemes, to help pay wages, keep staff employed and support businesses whose viability is threatened by the COVID-19 outbreak.

We have confirmed higher education providers' eligibility to apply for these schemes. The government has also announced a further package of support to universities and other research organisations to enable them to continue their research and innovation activities. This includes £280 million of government funding, as well as a package of low-interest loans with long pay-back periods, supplemented by a small amount of government grants. In sharing responsibility for the future of science and research with our world-leading university system, from the autumn, the government will cover up to 80% of a university's income losses from international students for the academic year 2020-21, up to the value of their non-publicly-funded research activity. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced further information about the Higher Education Restructuring Regime on 16 July. This may be deployed as a last resort, if a decision has been made to support a provider in England, when other steps to preserve a provider's viability and mitigate the risks of financial failure have not proved sufficient.

The overarching objectives which will guide the department's assessment of cases will be protecting the welfare of current students, preserving the sector's internationally outstanding science base and supporting the role that higher education providers play in regional and local economies through providing high quality courses aligned with economic and societal needs. We will consider providers' circumstances on a case-by-case basis, supported by expert advice, to ensure there is a robust value-for-money case for intervention, with support for restructuring in the form of repayable loans coming from public funds as a last resort and with strict conditions that align with wider government objectives.

We are working closely with the sector, the Office for Students (OfS) and across the government to understand the financial risks that providers are facing, and help providers access the support on offer. The OfS stated that one of its key priorities during the outbreak is to support the financial sustainability of the sector. Providers with concerns about their financial viability or sustainability have been encouraged to contact the OfS at the earliest opportunity. Considering the outbreak, the OfS has enhanced its financial sustainability reporting to identify sector and short-term viability risks to individual providers, as well as patterns across the sector.

*Monday 7 September 2020*

### **Academies: Uniforms**

**Dan Jarvis:** [81909] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance his Department has issued to academy trusts on ensuring the affordability of school uniforms.

**Nick Gibb:** It is for the governing body of a school (or in the case of academies, the academy trust) to decide whether there should be a school uniform, what it will be and how it should be sourced. To support them to do this the department issues best practice guidance which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-uniform>.

This makes clear that high priority must be given to cost considerations. The Department's guidance clearly states that uniform items should be easily available for parents to purchase and schools should keep compulsory branded items to a minimum. It also states that schools should avoid single supplier contracts, but where schools do choose to enter into such contracts, they should be subject to a regular competitive tendering process.

No school uniform should be so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling unable to apply to a school. The Government is pleased to support the Private Members' Bill to 'Make provision for guidance regarding the cost aspects of school uniform policies' which was recently introduced to Parliament on 5 February. This demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring that school uniform costs are reasonable.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

### **Children's Centres: Coronavirus**

**Andrew Rosindell:** [81612] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what guidance he has issued to children's centres on allowing physical contact for parents of children in temporary foster care during the covid-19 outbreak.

**Vicky Ford:** It is for local councils to decide how to organise and commission children's centre services in their area. We are clear, however, that contact between children in care and their birth relatives is important, and we expect this contact to continue during the COVID-19 outbreak. Contact arrangements, including for children in temporary foster care, should be assessed on a case by case basis taking into account a range of factors. This includes the government's guidance on social distancing, guidance on meeting people outside your household, and the needs of the child. It may not always be possible, or appropriate, for contact to happen at this time, and keeping in touch may need to take place virtually in certain circumstances.

However, we expect the spirit of any court-ordered contact in relation to children in care to be maintained. Where face-to-face contact is not possible, we encourage social workers and other professionals to reassure children and parents that this position is temporary and will be reviewed as soon

as it is possible to do so. Further information about contact arrangements for children in care is published in the COVID-19 guidance for children's social care services, which is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-forchildrens-social-care-services/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-authorities-onchildrens-social-care>.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

### Education: Standards

**Damian Hinds:** [81801] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment in the autumn term of the effect on children's progress of exposure during the covid-19 lockdown to different types and amounts of education technology and online learning.

**Nick Gibb:** Understanding the effect of time outside of the classroom, what factors have driven lost attainment and how quickly it is being recovered and how it is recovered over the next academic year is a key research priority for the Department to inform strategic policy for supporting the school system. To help schools provide effective online teaching, the Department has supported sector led initiatives such as Oak National Academy, which covers curriculum for every year group from reception through to year 11. The Department has also published guidance based on the current experiences and practices of teachers and school leaders so that other teachers can learn from examples of teaching practice during the COVID-19 outbreak as they develop their own approaches to providing remote education. This guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remote-education-practice-for-schools-duringcoronavirus-covid-19>. The Department recognises that barriers to online access can make engaging with remote education more difficult, which is why we have committed £100 million to fund devices and 4G connectivity to help pupils overcome them.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

### Free School Meals

**Siobhain McDonagh:** [81503] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, on what date the temporary extension of free school meals for children in families with No Recourse to Public Funds conditions will cease; and if he will publish a Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the ending of that extension.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** [81504] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate his Department has made of the cost of temporarily providing free school meals to certain groups of children subject to the No Recourse to Public Funds condition.

**Vicky Ford:** We are working with departments, across government, to evaluate access to free school meals for families with no recourse to public funds. In the meantime, the extension of eligibility will continue with the current income threshold until a decision on long-term eligibility is made. As part of this process, we will consider whether it would be appropriate to complete a Children's Rights Impact Assessment. At this point data is not currently available regarding the current costs of providing free school meals to certain groups of children subject to the no recourse to public funds condition.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

## Higher Education: Equality

**Stuart Anderson:** [82409] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to improve diversity among (a) students and (b) academic staff in higher education.

**Michelle Donelan:** It is crucial that we tap into the talent the UK has to offer and that higher education is available to all who are qualified by attainment to pursue it. The government brought forward sweeping reforms of higher education to promote equality of opportunity through the Higher Education and Research Act (2017). This includes a mandatory condition of registration which requires all higher education providers in England registered with the Office for Students (OfS) to publish data including the number of applications for admissions, offers made and acceptance rates broken down by gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background.

The OfS has issued guidance to higher education providers on how to comply with the transparency condition. Higher education providers wishing to charge higher level tuition fees must have an Access and Participation Plan agreed by the OfS. Through these plans, providers set out the measures they will take to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds and unrepresented groups can access and succeed in higher education. Ambitious new five-year Access and Participation Plans have been agreed for 2020-21 to 2024-25, which include targets and measures to close long standing gaps in equalities.

Recent data shows that the black ethnic group have seen the greatest proportional increase in progression rates to higher education by age 19 – from 44.1% in 2009-10 to 59.1% in 2018/19. The OfS has also made available online an interactive dashboard of data, which will help to evaluate access and participation at specific universities and colleges. The dashboard can be used to compare different student groups (for example, disabled students or students by their ethnic background) and their peers, and reveal gaps in access, continuation, success and progression. More information is available at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-datadashboard/>.

Higher education providers are independent and autonomous institutions and are responsible for their own decisions on employment issues. We expect providers, like all employers, to give due consideration to their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the way their employment practices affect different sections of their communities and staff at different stages of their careers.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

## Postgraduate Education: Loans

**Kevan Jones:** [81599] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether his Department plans to introduce maintenance loans for post-graduate education.

**Michelle Donelan:** Postgraduate master's and doctoral degree loans are intended as a contribution to the cost of postgraduate study. The loan can be used by students according to their personal circumstances to cover tuition fees, maintenance costs or any other costs associated with study. There are no plans to extend this further.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

## Remote Education: Standards

**Adam Holloway:** [78551] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what powers Ofsted will have after undertaking visits to schools in the period September 2020 to January 2021 to enforce standards in remote learning.

**Adam Holloway:** [78552] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how Ofsted visits to schools from September 2020 to January 2021 will differ from formal inspections; and what potential effect that will have on Ofsted's ability to (a) target failing schools (b) tackle any inadequacies in remote learning provision.

**Nick Gibb:** These are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman. I have asked her to write to my hon. Friend directly and a copy of her reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

### **Schools: Hygiene**

**Paul Beresford:** [81491] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment the Government has made, ahead of schools returning in September 2020, of the (a) effectiveness and (b) safety of the use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers in schools.

**Nick Gibb:** The Government has been clear that all pupils, in all year groups, should return to school full-time from the beginning of the autumn term and on 2 July we published guidance to help schools prepare for this. The guidance can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>.

The guidance sets out a system of controls which provide a framework for school leaders to put in place proportionate protective measures to minimise the risks of COVID-19 transmission, including cleaning hands thoroughly more often than usual. COVID-19 is an easy virus to kill when it is on skin. This can be done with soap and running water or hand sanitiser. Schools must ensure that pupils clean their hands regularly, including when they arrive at school, when they return from breaks, when they change rooms and before and after eating.

Schools have been advised to consider whether they have enough hand washing or hand sanitiser 'stations' available so that all pupils and staff can clean their hands regularly. Schools have also been asked to supervise hand sanitiser use given risks around ingestion. Small children and pupils with complex needs should be helped to clean their hands properly. Skin friendly cleaning wipes can also be used as an alternative where required.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

### **Secondary Education: Curriculum**

**Rupa Huq:** [82204] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of adding critical thinking to the secondary school curriculum.

**Nick Gibb:** It is imperative that all pupils, irrespective of background, are taught a broad and ambitious knowledge rich curriculum, covering the core academic subjects, alongside a vibrant arts education that gives pupils a deeper appreciation of their culture. This has been the emphasis of the Government's National Curriculum and qualifications changes, to ensure that more pupils are able to access 'the best that has been thought and said', and to think critically within their subjects.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*



## T-levels: Student Numbers

**Damian Hinds:** [81800] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the level of student enrolment for T Levels courses starting in September 2020.

**Gillian Keegan:** Despite the challenges, 44 high performing colleges, schools and other providers will teach the first T Levels from this September. This is testament to the hard work and dedication of staff in these organisations. We have worked closely with the providers to support them over the summer as recruitment moved online and to monitor predicted student numbers.

We will receive confirmed enrolment figures once the September recruitment has been formally reported. All indications are that recruitment has progressed well in the circumstances and a viable cohort of young people will benefit from taking these new, high quality qualifications, leaving them in a great position to move into skilled employment or further training.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

## Vocational Education: Assessments

**Gill Furniss:** [82242] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when he plans to provide further information on the reassessment procedure for students completing BTECs in summer 2020.

**Gillian Keegan:** As set out in the Secretary of State's statement of 1 September, most vocational and technical qualifications were not subject to standardisation like GCSEs and A levels. However, where an element of standardisation was used for some vocational qualifications, awarding organisations have reviewed these grades. This was done to ensure fairness for all pupils. Pearson, the awarding organisation responsible for BTECs reviewed its results to ensure no BTEC pupils were disadvantaged and that consistency was achieved with the principles applied to GCSEs and A Levels. Pearson published guidance on how BTEC results were being reviewed. This is available at:

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/campaigns/assessment-and-grading-in2020.html>.

They have worked closely with schools and colleges throughout the process. The vast majority of VTQ results have now been issued or reissued. No students saw their VTQ results downgraded - results either stayed the same or improved.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

## Free School Meals: Primary Education

**Theresa Villiers:** [83689] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether free schools meals are being offered to all pupils in the first three years of primary school in England.

**Vicky Ford:** We allocate £600 million per year to ensure that 1.4 million infants enjoy a free, healthy and nutritious meal at lunchtime following the introduction of the universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) policy in 2014. Now that schools are reopen to all children, those in reception, year 1 and year 2 in England's state-funded schools will receive a free meal.

During the period in which schools were largely closed, the government continued to provide support to those eligible for benefits related free school meals (FSM) through the National Voucher Scheme. Now that schools and their kitchens are open again, we expect them to provide free school meals to all those entitled to benefits related FSM and UIFSM to those children attending school. If a child needs to miss school for COVID-19 related matters, such as self-isolation due to a case of COVID-19, then we have

asked schools to provide meals to those entitled to benefits related FSM.

*Wednesday 9 September 2020*

### **Further Education and Schools: Finance**

**Mick Whitley:** [83960] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what additional funding he plans to make available to (a) schools and (b) further education providers to support the mental health needs of young people returning to classrooms in September 2020.

**Vicky Ford:** Getting children and young people back into education, with settings devoting time to supporting wellbeing, will play a fundamental part in supporting children and young people's mental health during the COVID-19 outbreak. All pupils and students will return to a full high-quality education programme in September, so they have the opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential.

Our £1 billion COVID-19 catch-up package, including a £650 million pupil premium shared across schools over the 2020-21 academic year, will support education settings to put the right catch-up support, including pastoral support, in place. The catch-up premium is in addition to core funding through which schools already support young people.

This year we are also providing £780 million additional high needs funding across England for children with the most complex special educational needs and disabilities. We are providing a further £730 million in 2021-22, which will bring the total high needs budget to over £8 billion. From September, when pupils and students will return to schools and colleges, the government is investing £8 million in the new Wellbeing for Education Return programme, which will provide schools and colleges all over England with the knowledge and practical skills they need to support teachers, students and parents to the emotional impact of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Schools and colleges may also need to access support from specialist services. NHS mental health services remain open and all NHS mental health trusts have been asked to ensure that there are 24/7 open access telephone lines to support people of all ages. In addition to this, the government has provided over £9 million to mental health charities to ensure they can continue to support people experiencing mental health challenges throughout the outbreak.

*Wednesday 9 September 2020*

### **GCE A-level: Assessments**

**Theresa Villiers:** [83686] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of postponing autumn A-level exams to the end of November 2020 to give students unable to take their A-levels in summer 2020 additional time to prepare for those exams.

**Nick Gibb:** We want students who wish to sit autumn exams to be able to do so at the earliest opportunity following the cancellation of exams in the summer. A-level exams will be sat in October so that students receive results before Christmas and can use them to progress to their next step as soon as possible.

*Wednesday 9 September 2020*

## Students: Loans

**Nick Fletcher:** [83973] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he (a) has made an assessment of the equity of student loan repayments being taken from probationary police officers in London whose allowance takes them over the threshold for repayment and (b) plans to change his policy on that issue.

**Michelle Donelan:** Repayments are made based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate, amount borrowed or borrower's occupation. Repayments are calculated as a fixed percentage of earnings, with only the amount of earnings above the relevant repayment threshold being considered – and if the borrower's income drops, so do repayments made. No repayments are made on earnings below the repayment thresholds.

Any outstanding debt is written off at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower. If, at the end of the year, the borrower's total income is below the relevant annual threshold, they may reclaim any repayments from the Student Loans Company made during that year. There are no plans to amend the regulations to apply different repayment terms to borrowers in different occupations.

*Wednesday 9 September 2020*

## Universities: Admissions

**Luke Evans:** [84361] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the ability of universities to manage the increased number of places available to students for the 2020-21 academic year.

**Michelle Donelan:** I have written directly to all Vice Chancellors and have set up a Higher Education Taskforce so that the government can work with the sector to build capacity, harness expert views and tackle challenges. Together, we have agreed that all students who achieved the required grades will be offered a place at their first-choice university, wherever possible. We have taken a number of steps to support this commitment.

We have announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, we will completely remove temporary student number controls to help ensure there are no additional barriers to students being able to progress to higher education. We have announced that we will lift caps on domestic medicine and dentistry courses in the next academic year. We will support providers to offer places to as many students who have met the grades for their current offer as they have capacity for, and where there are clinical placements available, through additional grant funding to support the costs of this provision.

We will also provide additional teaching grant funding to increase capacity in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and other high-cost subjects, which are vital to the country's social needs and economy. The Office for Students (OfS) will consult the sector on the details of how the allocations are made. Providers will also be eligible to bid for a share of up to £10 million in funding to support capital expenditure. This funding will be used to support the infrastructure required to accommodate additional students recruited as a result of the changes to policy on A level grades. The fund will be administered by the OfS, and providers will be eligible to bid for projects that support expansion in 2020-21. We will continue to monitor the situation and to consider the effects that deferrals will have on future years. Funding decisions for future years will be taken at the Spending Review.

*Wednesday 9 September 2020*

## Universities: Disadvantaged

**Emma Hardy:** [83917] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to make an assessment of the effect of the (a) covid-19 outbreak and (b) 2020 A-level awards process on university applications from students from disadvantaged backgrounds for the 2020-21 academic year in order to mitigate any such adverse effects for the 2021-22 academic year.

**Michelle Donelan:** The government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19. This has been an incredibly difficult time for students and this government is making every effort to make sure that all those who planned to move on to higher education can do so. Protecting students' mental health and wellbeing is a priority. I wrote to all higher education providers asking them to ensure they continue to support students. We have clarified that providers can use funding worth £256 million for the academic year of 2020/21, starting from August, towards student hardship funds and mental health support. Furthermore, the Office for Students has provided up to £3 million to fund the Student Space platform to bridge gaps in mental health support for students.

Through our government taskforce, we are working closely with universities to support them with the challenges they face and to help them build capacity for students entering university in the 2020/21 academic year. We have already announced that we intend to remove the temporary student number controls as well as the normal caps on medical and dental students. We will also be making additional funding available to universities to help them take on more students.

The government and the higher education sector have agreed that all students who achieved the required grades will be offered a place at their first-choice university in the 2020/21 academic year wherever possible, or if maximum capacity is reached, they will be offered an alternative course or a deferred place. In these circumstances, we have asked universities to particularly consider what they can do for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As of 2 September, The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service figures show that a record 24,680 18-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR4 quintile 1) in England have been accepted into university for 2020/21 – this is a record rate of 22.9%, compared to the same point last year. I also wrote to Vice Chancellors on 28 August, confirming that I would work with higher education providers in the coming weeks to support the 2021/21 intake of students.

We are also ensuring that higher education providers have the guidance they need to ensure that their provision is COVID-19 secure. We will continue to work with the sector to support them with the current challenges that providers might face as well as to deliver on this year's admission cycle and to allow the sector to access the government support on offer as needed.

*Wednesday 9 September 2020*

## Universities: Freedom of Expression

**Paul Girvan:** [82302] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure freedom of academic thought and expression at UK universities.

**Paul Girvan:** [82303] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if his Department will commission a report on the level of academic freedom in UK universities.

**Michelle Donelan:** Universities must protect academic freedom and must be places where staff and students with a diverse range of views are comfortable to express their views without fear of repercussion. A number of recent reports have provided evidence of a range of threats to freedom of speech and academic expression at UK universities. A 2019 report by Kings College London found signs of a "chilling effect"; as 1 in 4 students reported that they were scared to express their views for fear of repercussions. A recent report by Policy Exchange found that some academics feel similarly reluctant to express their

views, with some academics reporting that they face discrimination throughout recruitment and promotion processes as a result of their political views. Lawful free speech and academic freedom must be supported to the fullest extent at universities so that students, staff and visiting speakers feel free to explore a range of ideas and challenge perceived wisdom. Academic freedom is essential, and individuals or groups of academics must be free to carry out research even on contentious issues. We are exploring a range of legislative and non-legislative options to ensure this and my department will set out further steps in due course.

*Wednesday 9 September 2020*

### **Adult Education: Coronavirus**

**Luke Evans:** [84362] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to support lifelong learning and skills development for adult workers needing to re-skill after the covid-19 outbreak.

**Gillian Keegan:** The government has made a significant £2.5 billion (£3 billion when including Barnett funding for devolved administrations) funding commitment to the National Skills Fund. This is a substantial investment that provides a great opportunity to help workers and employers to have the skills they need to flourish and fulfil their potential. We are continuing to develop detailed proposals for the fund at pace, including considering how it could link to wider government COVID-19 recovery work. We will continue to review how the National Skills Fund can best meet the needs of individuals and employers.

The National Skills Fund is just one part of a wider programme to reform the post-16 skills system that will ensure businesses and individuals are able to meet the challenges of the new economy. Alongside the National Skills Fund, the department has been working to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. We have announced measures across a range of targeted work-based training offers to support people to build the skills they need to get into work. This includes:

- £17 million to triple the number of sector-based work academy programme placements;
- A new payment of £1,500 to employers in England for each new apprentice they hire aged 25 and over; and
- £32 million to help 269,000 more people receive advice from the National Careers Service.

We also launched The Skills Toolkit in April, a new online platform, giving access to free, high-quality digital and numeracy courses to help people build up their skills, progress in work and boost job prospects. We will shortly be announcing the expansion of this offer. The government appreciates the importance of adult education to improving people's life chances. We will continue to explore options within adult education to aid the post-COVID recovery.

*Thursday 10 September 2020*

### **Further Education: Coronavirus**

**Gill Furniss:** [82239] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what (a) assessment he has made of and (b) plans he has to monitor the adequacy of covid-19 risk assessments undertaken by further education colleges.

**Gill Furniss:** [82240] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what contingency planning he has undertaken to support sixth form students in the event they are unable to fully return to college in September 2020.

**Gillian Keegan:** Further education college corporations as statutory corporations and exempt charities are



responsible for completing risk assessments and the board must publish a statement in its annual accounts about how it manages risk. Health and safety legislation requires employers to assess risks and put in place proportionate control measures. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect staff, students and others from COVID-19 within the education setting. As set out in the further education autumn return guidance, further education providers are responsible for ensuring that these risk assessments are adequate and meet the relevant legal requirements.

We expect most students will be able to fully return to college in the autumn term, apart from a small number of students who are self-isolating or have been advised not to attend due to local restrictions. In these circumstances, we expect colleges to make sure education and training is delivered remotely, as set out in our further education autumn return guidance published on 2 July and updated on 29 August. This guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/what-fe-colleges-and-providers-will-need-to-do-from-the-start-of-the-2020-autumn-term>.

*Thursday 10 September 2020*

### **GCE A-Level and GCSE: Assessments**

**Helen Hayes:** [83890] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of alternative algorithms and methods to moderate the 2020 GCSE and A-Level results; and for what reasons his Department decided to use the published algorithm.

**Helen Hayes:** [83891] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what use (a) his Department and (b) Ofqual made of historic pupil value added data when moderating the 2020 (i) GCSE and (ii) A-level grades.

**Helen Hayes:** [83892] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department made of the outcome of the results for pupils attending schools with larger than average class sizes in advance of the 2020 (a) GCSE and (b) A-level grades being moderated using Ofqual's algorithm for moderating.

**Nick Gibb:** The development of the algorithm used to moderate the 2020 GCSE and A level results was a matter for Ofqual as independent regulator. In April and May, Ofqual worked with technical experts across the sector to test 12 different statistical standardisation models using data from previous years. In selecting the final model, Ofqual chose the one that most accurately predicted students' grades in a way that did not systematically affect groups of students with particular protected characteristics. Ofqual also considered operational issues, such as how easy it was to implement the approaches consistently across all four exam boards, and issues of transparency. Detailed analysis of the potential approaches to standardisation considered, and details of the testing of the different models, and the results of this testing, can be found in Ofqual's published report at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-gcse-as-a-levels-in-summer2020-interim-report>.

*Thursday 10 September 2020*

### **GCE A-level and GCSE: Assessments**

**Seema Malhotra:** [85053] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what his Department's policy is on fees charged to school pupils to re-sit (a) GCSE and (b) A-level examinations in autumn 2020.

**Nick Gibb:** The Department is providing funding support to schools on autumn exam fees and we expect school and colleges to pay these on behalf of all the students they enter in the autumn. This is set out in

our guidance on GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series/centre-responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-seriesguidance>.

The autumn exams are an important backstop to the summer grade process and we are helping schools and colleges to offer them to students by assisting with additional space and invigilators where required, as well as covering exam fee deficits to ensure that exam fees are not passed on to students.

*Thursday 10 September 2020*

### **Schools: Coronavirus**

**Luke Pollard:** [84737] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent estimate he has made of the number of schools providing care before and after the start of the school day on reopening as the covid-19 restrictions are eased.

**Vicky Ford:** As of 4 July, providers offering before or after-school care and other out-of-school activities to children have been able to open, both on or away from school premises, with protective measures in place. The department does not hold a central register of all wraparound provision and so does not routinely collect data on the number of providers in operation. However, newly established REACT teams, comprising education and social care staff from both this department and Ofsted, are working closely with local authorities and will be a valuable source of intelligence on the sufficiency of wraparound care places in local areas.

We are also encouraging schools to resume their breakfast and after-school club provision, where possible, from the start of the autumn term; and, as part of our guidance to schools on full opening, have provided them with guidance to support them in reopening this valuable provision, which is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#wraparound-provision-andextra-curricular-activity>.

Schools should also be working closely with any external wraparound providers which their pupils may use, to ensure as far as possible, children can be kept in a group with other children from the same bubble they are in during the school day; and we have published further updated guidance for providers who run before and after school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school settings for children on the protective measures that should be put in place from the start of the autumn term, to ensure they are operating as safely as possible when all children return to school. This guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protectivemeasures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-forchildren-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-ofschool-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>.

*Thursday 10 September 2020*

### **Assessments: Appeals**

**Seema Malhotra:** [85052] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what his Department's policy is on appeals by students of their centre assessed grades; and if he will make a statement.

**Nick Gibb:** Ofqual has published summary guidance, agreed with school and college leaders, which makes clear what the process was for putting together centre assessment grades and the grounds of appeal which are available. The guidance can be viewed here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/887018/Summer\\_2020\\_Awarding\\_GCSEs\\_A\\_levels\\_-\\_Info\\_for\\_Heads\\_of\\_Centre\\_22MAY2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887018/Summer_2020_Awarding_GCSEs_A_levels_-_Info_for_Heads_of_Centre_22MAY2020.pdf).

Any students who have evidence of bias or discrimination will be able to go through the normal complaints procedure at their school or college or complain to the exam board, which could investigate potential malpractice.

*Friday 11 September 2020*

### Teachers: Coronavirus

**Gill Furniss:** [86735] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the provision of fast-tracked testing for teachers with (a) symptoms of covid-19 and (b) who have come into contact with someone with covid-19 symptoms.

**Nick Gibb:** All members of school staff and pupils should get a test if they have symptoms of COVID-19. The capacity of the NHS Test and Trace system must be protected for those with symptoms of the virus, and so it is vital that only those with symptoms get tested. Anyone who has been in close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID19 must self-isolate in line with guidance, but should not get tested unless they themselves develop symptoms.

*Friday 11 September 2020*

### Teachers: Training

**Chi Onwurah:** [86654] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what training has been provided to teachers to help them adapt to remote teaching.

**Nick Gibb:** We expect schools to have a strong contingency plan for remote education in place in case of any localised disruption to face-to-face education. We have asked schools to look to align the quality of their existing provision against the expectations set out in the published guidance on curriculum and remote education provision. This guidance is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schoolsduring-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools#section-3-curriculum-behaviour-and-pastoral-support>.

The Department has provided a range of resources to support schools in delivering remote education. This includes examples of teaching practice during COVID-19, which provides an opportunity for schools to learn from each other's approaches to remote education, as well as our work with sector-led initiatives such as Oak National Academy. Examples of teaching practise during COVID-19 are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remote-education-practice-for-schools-duringcoronavirus-covid-19>.

The Department has made £4.84 million available for Oak National Academy, both for the summer term of the academic year 2019-20 and for the 2020-21 academic year, to provide video lessons for Reception up to Year 11. This will include specialist content for pupils with SEND. Oak will remain a free optional resource for 2020-21. The Government is also funding expert technical support to help schools set up secure user accounts for Google and Microsoft's education platforms. Schools can apply for government-funded support through The Key for School Leaders to get set up on one of two free-to-use digital education platforms: G Suite for Education or Office 365 Education. The Key provides feature comparisons on the two platforms to enable schools to make an informed choice, as well as case studies on how schools are making the most of these platforms. Information is available here:

<https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/> The Department's EdTech Demonstrator programme has also been helping schools and colleges access training and advice on remote teaching during the COVID-19 outbreak. Further information about the programme is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/edtech-demonstrator-schools-andcolleges-successful->

applicants/about-the-programme.

While schools and colleges were closed to most pupils, the support package provided by the Demonstrators included direct one-to-one advice and training, along with an offer of online tutorials, webinars and recorded content. The Demonstrator programme will continue to offer Continuing Professional Development to all state-funded schools and colleges in England until March 2021, and the Demonstrators will continue to bridge the gap between technology available to schools and colleges and successfully using that technology to deliver education. Support can be tailored to meet individual needs, while considering start point, confidence in technology practices and the time available to senior leaders. Transitioning back to the classroom, blended teaching approaches, creating a remote education contingency plan and implementing a digital strategy are just a few examples of how the Demonstrators can support schools and colleges.

*Friday 11 September 2020*

## Home Office

### Police: Schools

**Kate Green:** [81876] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what guidance has been issued to police forces on the carrying and use of tasers in schools by schools-based police officers.

**Kit Malthouse:** The Government does not issue specific guidance on the use of police equipment in schools. This is an operational matter for Chief officers to determine. Officers must pass a comprehensive training programme before they can carry Tasers.

**Kate Green:** [81877] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many schools-based police officers are (a) authorised to carry tasers and (b) permitted to carry tasers in schools in each police force in England.

**Kit Malthouse:** The Home Office does not record the number of Taser devices or the number of officers authorised to carry Tasers. This is an operational matter for Chief Officers, and it is for them to determine the number of devices and specially trained officers needed based on their force assessment of threat and risk. Officers must pass a comprehensive training programme before they can carry Tasers.

*Monday 7 September 2020*

## H M Treasury

### Universities

**Chi Onwurah:** [84233] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment his Department has made of the contribution of universities to the local economy.

**Kemi Badenoch:** Universities play a significant role in their local economy, including by equipping people with skills that raise productivity and living standards, and through the wider economic contributions of students to their local area. The Government continually works with the sector and representative bodies to better understand the impact of universities, including on local economies. Universities regularly submit

evidence on research impact relevant to their immediate geographic area for the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), with first results expected to be published in December 2020, should also enable universities to assess their civic role, as part of their approach to knowledge exchange more broadly.

*Tuesday 8 September 2020*

## Department for Work and Pensions

### Kickstart Scheme

**Lucy Powell:** [84265] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential effect on employer operations of the requirement for them to have a minimum of 30 placements on take-up of the Kickstart scheme.

**Mims Davies:** Employers looking to take on less than 30 Kickstarters can apply through an intermediary or representative body such as Local Authorities, Mayoral Combined Authorities, trade bodies, Chambers of Commerce and charities. We know that smaller employers may need support through the bidding process and may not have access to the HR and other services to provide the level of support we are looking for employers to provide Kickstart participants.

As intermediaries are approved their details will be made available on Gov.uk and JCPs will be able to guide local employers to local intermediaries. We've set an initial minimum limit of 30 placements per bid to help us to effectively manage the grant application process as we build confidence in our delivery mechanisms and we will keep this threshold under review.

**Lucy Powell:** [84267] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps her Department has taken to sign-up employers to the Kickstart scheme.

**Mims Davies:** We are working with partner organisations in all sectors to ensure that the scheme is of maximum benefit to participants and employers. We are working closely with local and national partners, to ensure Kickstart jobs are aligned to local labour market need, are additional and support the recovery.

**Lucy Powell:** [84268] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reasons public sector employers are not eligible for inclusion in the Kickstart scheme.

**Mims Davies:** The Kickstart Scheme is open to employers from across the private, public and charity sector.

*Monday 7 September 2020*

### Kickstart Scheme

**Andrew Rosindell:** [81613] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the effect of the requirement for candidates for the kickstart scheme to be in receipt of universal credit on the take-up of that scheme; and if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing that requirement.

**Mims Davies:** Our initial focus is on young people who are currently on Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment as they have most to gain from an opportunity like Kickstart. Work Coaches will work with young people to identify those most suitable for the Kickstart scheme and can match suitable young



people to vacancies. We will consider expanding to other groups as we grow the volume of Kickstart roles available.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** [81868] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans she has to impose mandatory conditions to encourage (a) universal credit and (b) job seeker's allowance claimants aged below 25 to participate in the Kickstart Scheme.

**Mims Davies:** Work Coaches will work with young people to agree the part of the wider package of support which best meets their needs, including whether to offer them the opportunity to participate in Kickstart.

**Jonathan Reynolds:** [81869] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate she has made of the number of permanent jobs that will be created by the Kickstart Scheme. **Mims Davies:** We have made no estimate of the number of permanent jobs that will be created by the Kickstart Scheme; nor have we set targets. We want as many young people as possible to move from their Kickstart role into a permanent job. And we hope that many employers will find that they are in a position to offer a permanent role following a Kickstart placement. Where this is not possible, the Kickstart participant will be supported to find a role with another employer after they have completed their Kickstart funded job. At the end of six months, these young people will have recent experience for their CV and new skills, giving them a much stronger starting point to pursue their job goals,

**Jonathan Reynolds:** [81870] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what data the Government plans to collect to assess the impact of the Kickstart scheme; how often that data will be published; and whether that data will be disaggregated by (a) geographic area, (b) age and (c) disability.

**Mims Davies:** The Kickstart scheme will be subject to evaluation to assess its impact. We expect to make use of a range of data on participants and employers, collected via a range of sources including grant agreements and management information.

Tuesday 8 September 2020

### Kickstart Scheme

**Alberto Costa:** [85070] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of extending the Kickstart scheme to allow smaller businesses to take on fewer than 30 new workers under the scheme.

**Mims Davies:** Companies looking to recruit fewer than 30 Kickstart applicants are still able to benefit from Kickstart by bidding for placements via an intermediary organisation. Intermediaries can gather employers keen to offer Kickstart jobs to make a collective bid of 30 or more vacancies. Smaller employers will have support from the intermediary to create high quality roles and additional support so that young people get the most out of their placement. This also reduces the administrative burden falling on the small employer. The department has received significant interest from a wide range of bodies including local authorities, charities and trade/industry bodies looking to become intermediaries.

**Owen Thompson:** [86116] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for what reason the Government has set the minimum level of Kickstart Scheme roles at 30 per company.

**Mims Davies:** Companies looking to offer roles to fewer than 30 Kickstart applicants are able to benefit from Kickstart by bidding for placements via an intermediary organisation. Intermediaries can gather employers keen to offer Kickstart jobs to make a collective bid of 30 or more vacancies. Smaller employers will have support from the intermediary to create quality roles and additional support so that young people

get the most out of their placement, including training, this also reduces the administrative burden falling on the small employer. The department has received significant interest from a wide range of bodies including local authorities, charities and trade/industry bodies looking to become intermediaries.

*Thursday 10 September 2020*

## House of Lords

### Universities: Admissions

**Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with universities regarding accommodating the demand for places on courses following the withdrawal of A-level results based on algorithms; and what additional resources are being made available to universities as a result of the change of policy. [HL7611]

**Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay:** My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, has written directly to all Vice Chancellors and has set up a Higher Education Taskforce so that the government can work with the sector to build capacity, harness expert views and tackle challenges. Together, we have agreed that all students who achieved the required grades will be offered a place at their first-choice university, wherever possible. We have taken a number of steps to support this commitment. We have announced that, subject to parliamentary approval, we will completely remove temporary student number controls to help ensure there are no additional barriers to students being able to progress to higher education.

We have announced that we will lift caps on domestic medicine and dentistry courses in the next academic year. We will support providers to offer places to as many students who have met the grades for their current offer as they have capacity for, and where there are clinical placements available, through additional grant funding to support the costs of this provision. We will also provide additional teaching grant funding to increase capacity in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and other high-cost subjects, which are vital to the country's social needs and economy. The Office for Students (OfS) will consult the sector on the details of how the allocations are made.

Providers will also be eligible to bid for a share of up to £10 million in funding to support capital expenditure. This funding will be used to support the infrastructure required to accommodate additional students recruited as a result of the changes to policy on A level grades. The fund will be administered by the OfS, and providers will be eligible to bid for projects that support expansion in 2020/21. We will continue to monitor the situation and to consider the effects that deferrals will have on future years. Funding decisions for future years will be taken at the Spending Review.

*Thursday 10 September 2020*

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