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Preface

This issue of *Education Journal Review* combines papers on subjects from the pre-COVID world that now seems so long ago with the beginning of the COVID pandemic.

There are two papers that touch on the British government's controversial policies with synthetic phonics as the only way to teach reading in the early years, a policy that has now reached Australia. We also review two select committee reports on this sector.

It was only six months ago that governments all over the world were grappling with what was a new disease that we knew next to nothing about. While the science was the same everywhere, and the scientific advice was that the scientists really did not know that much, the reaction of governments and people around the world varied greatly. For some, the science was not the only or even the main issue, as politics, religion and culture were major factors as well.

Initially, almost every country in the world closed its schools. But what was the evidence behind this? It was surprisingly little, as scientists really did not know much about COVID-19. We look at the evidence then available and also have an article from NFER about what government could learn from other countries.

From Volume 25 issue number 2, published in 2018, we have published a review of every parliamentary select committee report dealing with education. This series of reviews starts in January 2018 and will run to the present day. The delays in publication of this journal that we are now overcoming mean that in this issue it is still the reports from 2018 and 2019 that we are covering. We will continue with reports from 2019 in issue number three of the present volume, to be published this coming week, and expect to catch up with all the reports so far published in 2020 in the three issues of volume 27, to be published next month.

Demitri Coryton
Editor

Paul Gardner

The GERM is Spreading: Literacy in Australia

By Dr Paul Gardner
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Dr Paul Gardner is a Senior Lecturer in English/Literacy at the School of Education, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia.

Abstract*: The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), emerged in the 1980s and has influenced the education systems of the USA, England and, increasingly, Australia (Sahlberg 2012). Perhaps the GERM juggernaut has been a little slower to arrive in Australia, but it is now coming down the road at breakneck speed and it looks remarkably like the one witnessed in England, following the 'Rose Report' (2006). Needless to say, the 'primacy' of synthetic phonics is emblazoned in large capital letters down the side of the vehicle. At the steering wheel are drivers who look remarkably like those driving the English counterpart: a Minister of Education of a newly elected neo-liberal government and appointed 'reading experts', some of whom have pecuniary interests in commercial synthetic phonic programmes.*

Keywords: literacy, policy, practice, synthetic phonics

After several years of high profile media advocacy of phonics and the alleged 'failure' of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers to 'skill' graduate teachers in the 'science of reading' (sic), the 'reading experts' have been given license to write the rules for ITE providers in Australia.

In his press release of 15th October 2019, the Federal Education Minister, Dan Tehan, announced the formation of a panel of 'experts' to inform the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) on the accreditation of teachers, in relation to reading. In fact, the 'expert' panel had already been formed and actually had its first meeting on the same day as the press release. AITSL, devises baseline

standards for teachers, which function in the same way as the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) standards in England. In 2010, the QTS standards were revised to include a clause making mandatory the teaching of synthetic phonics integral to ITE courses. The Education Minister of the day, Michael Gove, and the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, members of a newly elected neo-liberal government, anointed, Ruth Miskin, as their literacy 'expert'. As readers in England will be aware, Ruth Miskin, was the sole shareholder of the commercial synthetic phonic programme, Read Write Inc. The possibility there might be a conflict of interest in this appointment, especially when the government then identified Read Write Inc. as one of several preferred programmes for schools, seemed to slip beneath the radar. The parallel between England nine years ago and Australia today is not hard to discern.

The panel of 'experts', announced by the Australian Minister of Education, consists of three people: Jennifer Buckingham, Lorraine Hammond and Robyn Cox. At this point it would be pertinent to interrogate the credentials of the members of the 'expert panel'. Like Miskin, Jennifer Buckingham, has a vested interest, as the Strategy Director, of a commercial phonics programmes: MiniLit, MultiLit and InitalLit. Until very recently she was also employed by the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), a neo-liberal think-tank, which states its mission is to have its members infiltrate every institution in Australia. She is also a member of the AITSL board. Lorraine Hammond is an Associate Professor at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. Her background is in special educational needs and she is President of Learning Difficulties Australia. She is also an ardent advocate of Direct Instruction (DI). Robyn Cox is the current President of The Primary English Teaching Association of Australia (PETAA). She is also an Associate Professor of Literacy Education at the Australian Catholic University and has been an executive member of the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA). Of the three members of the panel then, Robyn Cox is, perhaps, the only member that can be justly referred to as a literacy expert. However, as the 'minority' member of the panel her expertise is likely to be overshadowed by the vested interests of the other two panel members. This point is reinforced by the transparency of the Minister's intentions for the panel of 'experts'.

The press release was titled. 'Bringing Phonics into

Australian Schools', which implies phonics is not being taught in Australian schools. Not only is phonics being taught, as an essential component of reading, it is also firmly embedded in the Australian National Curriculum. The question that arises is: is the Minister being disingenuous, or is he being misadvised about the pedagogy of reading in Australian schools? Both Buckingham and Hammond have used the media to claim ITE providers are not preparing teacher graduates to teach reading. Buckingham has been the stronger critic of ITE courses, by publishing a 'research' paper on the issue. The paper was actually published by MultiLIt, the company of which she is a director. It was not peer-reviewed and is deeply methodologically flawed. Despite its poor scholarly pedigree, the paper received widespread media coverage, particularly in the Murdoch press. The dissemination of erroneous information is a hallmark of neo-liberal strategists, aided by the main stream media. The formula is plain to see: incite a crisis by widely imparting false information; demoralise and disempower those who are being criticised by constraining their right of reply; create a climate that makes change an imperative and then get appointed to bodies that have the power to implement the desired change

Australia is a federated nation of six States and two Territories; each has its own constitution and legislature. So, desired educational policy, at a national level, has to be agreed by all the State Ministers of Education, before in can be enacted across the country. AITSL is the one body that gives advocates of synthetic phonics a direct route, through all ITE providers, to all schools in Australia. By changing the AITSL teaching standards, the 'expert panel' can change the pedagogic culture in Australia. Alongside this change, it is possible to envisage the 'expert' panel recommending the use of specified synthetic phonic programmes, as was the case in England. Like Miskin, it is equally possible that Buckingham could be the beneficiary of such a recommendation, given her interest in MultiLit. In England, it has been observed that commercial synthetic phonics programs are dictating pedagogical choices, thereby restricting the professional decision making of teachers (Bradbury 2018). So, these advocates of synthetic phonics have the potential to 'take' Australian literacy education in a pincer movement, consisting of official directives, through AITSL, and the capitalisation of a burgeoning market place. It is a neo-liberal's dream scenario.

Australian educators' need to be aware that when researchers inspected 100 phonics programmes they found that many were linguistically inaccurate, because they did not reflect English orthography or correct grapho-phonic correspondences (Beard, Brooks & Ampaw-Farr 2019).

Another aspect of the Minister's announcement was that 'a free phonics health check' (PHC) would be implemented. The phonics 'health' check referred to is actually the Phonics Screening Check (PSC), which has been in use in England since 2012. Buckingham has been campaigning for the PSC to be adopted in Australia for at least the last two and a half years. In April 2017, the neoliberal CIS hosted Nick Gibb in Australia and Buckingham escorted him on his promotion of the PSC. The proposed adoption of the PSC in Australia ignores findings from England, which suggest that 98% of teachers stated the PSC did not provide them with information they did not already know about their students' reading abilities (Clark & Glazzard 2018), and that students' knowledge of vocabulary, as well as knowledge of grapho-phonic correspondences, is used when decoding words in the PSC, which implies the sole use of phonics is inadequate (Darnell, Solity & Wall 2017).This finding challenges the argument that fluent decoding can only be acquired by means of a strict fidelity to synthetic phonics. A further flaw in the PSC is the narrow range of grapho-phonic correspondences (GPCs) used in the 40 words that comprise the test. Darnell, Solity & Wall (2017) found that only 15 of the 85 GPCs made up 67% of the test and that 31.8% of GPCs were not being tested at all.

These findings deflate the claim that synthetic phonics is the exclusive, evidence based, method of decoding. Perhaps even more concerning, however, is the Minister's use of the term 'health' when referring to the test, which 'frames' the discourse around the medicalisation of early literacy in the Australian context. Given that speech pathologists and experts in health have been in the vanguard of the movement for synthetic phonics in Australia, the Minister's use of the term is unsurprising, but it demonstrates the extent to which early reading has become subsumed under a medical paradigm.

Two members of the task force privilege the 'Simple View of Reading' (SVR) as the exemplary model of reading pedagogy. Whilst the SVR correctly differentiates decoding and comprehension, the model, as discussed by these members of the AITSL task force, seems misconceived. For example, the

attention given to the function of linguistic comprehension, as a symbiotic element of the model, is left wanting whilst the tendency is to privilege decoding, based on phonics. This is reminiscent of how, in England, synthetic phonics was made statutory leaving linguistic comprehension to fend for itself. The original advocates of the SVR were clear that a 'bottom-up' approach to early reading was not the intention of their model (Hoover and Gough 1990). The discourse of the Minister's announcement reinforced the bias towards synthetic phonics. In total, the press-release mentioned phonics six times, reading twice (once in relation to the PHC) and comprehension once. The press release also referred to the 'fundamentals of reading', which were identified as: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Whilst it would be agreed these elements are essential components (referred to as the 'Big Five'), they do not constitute the whole of reading pedagogy. For example, no reference is made to oral language and linguistic comprehension; prior knowledge of the reader; morphology, syntactic knowledge etc. If the Minister's announcement is indicative of the 'expert' panel's terms of reference, the model of reading being advocated is as reductionist as the prescriptive model adopted in England.

Since the Minister's announcement of the 15th October, there has been a further development that indicates the shape of things to come. By the end of November, universities are required to provide AITSL with information about their 'current approaches to reading instruction'. ITE providers have been given a template to complete, stating how they teach and assess the 'Big Five'; the proportion of time devoted to the teaching of phonics and the proportion of this time that is spent on the teaching of synthetic phonics. In December the 'expert' panel will advise on amendments to the Standards and Procedures for the accreditation of ITE programs. December marks the culmination of phase one of planned changes. In phase two, ITE providers will be given, 'additional guidance and resources to include in reading instruction'. This work will be concluded by June 2020. However, it is already becoming apparent the 'expert' panel is likely to 'recommend' that ITE providers allocate 50% of their Primary English units to the teaching of reading. If this 'recommendation' comes to pass, it will make it impossible to deliver the breadth and depth of the Australian English Curriculum. Furthermore, depending on the recommended time allocation for the teaching of synthetic

phonics, it may make it difficult to teach a broad pedagogy of reading. A corollary of this will be less time allocated to the teaching of writing, despite strong evidence that standards in writing have deteriorated in Australia since 2011 (Gardner 2018).

It is intellectually indefensible to advocate a single approach to the teaching of early reading. A reductionist view is premised upon a unitary conceptualisation of the learner (i.e. that all leaners are the same and they all learn in the same way). Furthermore, the imposition of a single approach by an outside body contravenes academic freedom and the legitimate scope of academics to critique models and approaches. However, this argument did not hold in England, where the political will behind synthetic phonics 'strait-jacketed' academic freedom (Gardner 2017). The extent to which Australia may follow exactly the same course as England is contestable, to a degree. What is clear is that the advocates of synthetic phonics have constructed an argument that fits the educational paradigm of a neo-liberal government early in its term of office. As in England, the national standards for teachers are being used as the lever to dictate the teaching of reading in initial teacher education (ITE). In England, the Minister for Education had the unilateral power to make the teaching of synthetic phonics a statutory requirement. His Australian counterpart does not have that capacity. In Australia, national strategies must be agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which consists of the First Ministers of the six States and two Territories. Although, South Australia has already implemented the PSC and New South Wales has proposed a trial, it is unlikely all states will agree to its use. That said, the Federal Government holds a trump card: money. The usual means of persuading States and Territories to implement national priorities is by means of additional funding. The Federal Minister has already stated the proposed, 'Phonics Health Check', will be 'free', which implies it will be funded centrally, and not from the coffers of the States and Territories.

So far, it is possible to identify the strategies the Australian Government has borrowed from England, but it may also be possible to predict the next steps. The Newly Qualified Teacher's Survey was used by Gove to monitor the impact of the teaching of synthetic phonics by ITE providers. A similar survey exists in Australia. In England the government recommended that schools purchase specifically named phonic

programmes and match funded purchases. We might expect the Australian Government to do likewise. English 'synphonpreneurs' (proprietors of synthetic phonic programmes) have already made incursions into the Australian educational marketplace. In addition to Jolly Phonics, recent 'players' include, Read Write Inc. and Sounds Right, which is promoted by the Dyslexia-SPELD Foundation. We can add to this list InitiaLit, a product from the company of which Jennifer Buckingham is the Strategic Director. These programmes are likely to feature on any recommended list the Australian Government might produce in the near future. The English government also gave a contract to its literacy 'expert', Ruth Miskin, (Ruth Miskin Phonics Training) to run phonics roadshows. Miskin's counterpart in Australia, Jennifer Buckingham, has already toured her phonics roadshow to several capital cities. The web page advertising these events is revealing. Although, the blurb refers to presenters from the Five from Five Literacy Project and The Macquarie Centre for Reading, The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), is also named. It is possible, the CIS is pump-priming a project the Federal Government will fund later. If so, like, Miskin, Buckingham is well placed to win the contract.

Jennifer Buckingham is the fulcrum connected to all the parts: Five from Five, MulitLit, The Macquarie Centre for Reading, the Minister for Education, Nick Gibb, AITSL and the CIS. Her current job title of 'Strategic Director' is transparently apt. She has fulfilled the CIS mission of getting its people into positions of influence. One of the functions of GERM and neo-liberal think-tanks around the world has been to hijack public discourses about education in order to reshape thinking; to de-professionalise teachers and ITE for 'political gain' (Mullen, C.A. et al 2013) and to filtrate education with 'free market ideas ' (McDonald 2013). However, the federated nature of the Australian political system may frustrate a process that was more streamlined in England. Australian educators also have hindsight by proxy (the English experience) to guide their response. The tactics of neo-liberal think-tanks in educational discourse is more transparent now than in the past, and their manipulation of 'evidence' to construct an argument is obvious. Ultimately, the argument is not about reading; it is about ideology. However, literacy experts will succeed by 'calling-out' the fake 'evidence' used by think-tanks through a systematic interrogation of evidence, which includes re-visiting the texts of

the researchers they so often cite. The Simple View of Reading, for example, is far more complex than the synphonpreneurs claim it to be.

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Margaret M Clark OBE

The future of early reading courses in initial teacher education institutions in England: Who controls the content?

By Margaret M. Clark OBE

Margaret M Clark was awarded a DLitt for her early published research on reading and an OBE for her services to early years education. She has been elected to the Reading Hall of Fame, an independent organisation that recognises lifetime achievement in the field of reading. She was Professor and Head of the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Birmingham and is now a Visiting Professor at Newman University.

Abstract*: The education policy discussed here is mandatory only in England, not the United Kingdom, as education is a devolved power. The Department for Education and Ofsted are responsible only for schools in England. Since 2010 there have been five Secretaries of State for Education. However, Nick Gibb was reappointed Minister of State for School Standards after the December 2019 general election. He has over many years promoted the government's systematic synthetic phonics policy, for which he has been complimented publicly in parliament by both the chairman of the Education Select Committee and the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. Nick Gibb has claimed the success of this policy in debates, in written answers to MPs' questions, in articles and at conferences around the world (including in Australia). It is for this reason that quotations I have selected are from him, not the Secretaries of State.*

Keywords: literacy, policy, practice, synthetic phonics

There has been a growing insistence by the government since 2012 that in the teaching of early reading in primary schools in England there should be a focus on phonics, not just as one of a range of strategies, but that synthetic phonics should be adopted as the only way to teach all children to read. This policy is claimed to be based on research evidence that synthetic phonics only is the best way to teach all children to read. None of the research that challenges the government statements and those of Ofsted is cited in government policy documents (Clark, 2019).

This policy has had a major impact on practice in schools, removing the freedom of practitioners in England to include other approaches they consider to be appropriate for their individual children. The introduction of the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) in 2012 as a mandatory assessment for all children at the end of year 1 when the children are around six years of age has had further, even possibly unintended consequences, in narrowing the

children's literacy experience in the early years. Teachers and parents have expressed concern at the effects of the check, including on children who can already read (Clark and Gazzard, 2018). As early as in many nursery and reception classes in many schools, children repeatedly practice real and non-words (pseudo words) in anticipation of the check, this continues for those who fail and are required to re-sit the check. This has become a high stakes test where schools are expected to achieve a higher percentage pass each year, and children who fail to read 32 of 40 words correctly are required to re-sit the check at the end of year 2. Now the school's percentage pass on the PSC tends to be a major focus in Ofsted judgements and is frequently cited by the Schools Minister Nick Gibb as evidence of improvement in reading, and, as a consequence of the government's insistence on synthetic phonics. We now see this policy also being required by Ofsted in institutions involved in initial teacher education, and from September 2020 Ofsted may enforce this policy even further, requiring that tutors present systematic synthetic phonics as the method of teaching early reading.

Effects of government phonics policy on primary schools in England

There is research evidence on the effects of the government's policy on classroom practice from observation, showing grouping for phonics as distinct from reading, even in nursery and reception classes (Bradbury and Russell-Holmes 2017). Carter in her research presents evidence through the voices of children (Carter, 2020a) and in a further article, Carter reports on the voices of the teachers, 'those closest to the implementation of the PSC…'(Carter 2020b). She supports her own research with evidence from other authors, who 'found that teachers had lost sight of why phonics is taught, and that phonics is not a subject in its own right but a means to an end'. To quote from her Conclusion:

..these practices presented a tension between teaching to the test and reading development …….

Carter, 2020b)

There is little evidence of any improvement in attainment other than on the actual check that can clearly be attributed to this policy, though the government does cite the results of PIRLS 2016, a claim that may be exaggerated (See Teaching Initial Literacy: Policies, evidence and ideology, Clark

ed., 2018 Part II). At no time has Nick Gibb referred to lessons that England might learn from either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, both countries ranked statistically higher than England in PIRLS, yet both countries take a very different approach to reading-pedagogy and to collaboration with teachers. Nor does the minister reference the cautions in the reports on PIRLS against drawing causal relationships from the data, nor possible alternative explanations for this rise in ranking (Clark, 2018).

While consulting on other aspects of assessment policy, the Department for Education has not consulted either teachers or parents as to whether they regard the PSC as providing valuable information, or about whether the PSC should remain statutory (see Appendix I in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

Children, if they are to read with understanding, need to develop strategies for speedy recognition of words they have not met before. Like most academics I do not deny the importance of phonics in learning to read. However, there is evidence that this is better practised within context rather than in isolation. Time spent decoding words in isolation, or as in many schools in England on practising pseudo words to enable schools to achieve a high percentage pass on the PSC, might be better spent studying the features of real written English.

In a recent valuable guidance publication for teachers, the Education Endowment Foundation lists key recommendations for the teaching of literacy at Key Stage 1 (EEF, 2017). Three of the key recommendations are:

1. Develop pupils' speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language.
2. Use a balanced and engaging approach to developing reading, which integrates both decoding and comprehension skills.
3. Effectively implement a systematic phonics programme.

Note the emphasis is on 'integration of decoding and comprehension' and that the reference is to a systematic phonics programme, not to synthetic phonics as the only approach as currently required in England.

Ideology rather than consultation?

In written answers to questions and in his speeches, Nick Gibb repeatedly claims that current policy is 'evidence-based'. Until recently the research cited by the Minister in support of synthetic phonics as the only method for initial teaching of

reading was that conducted in Clackmannanshire in Scotland around 2005 and this is still cited also by Ofsted. When considering this 'evidence' it is important to note that:

- The research cited was conducted in 2005
- Its methodology has been seriously criticised (see for example Ellis and Moss, 2014)
- As early as 2006 a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate in Scotland expressed concern at low standards of literacy in Clackmannanshire and in 2016 Clackmannanshire commissioned an independent enquiry which produced a damning report on literacy standards, as a consequence of which the county now has in place a different policy to improve the county's standards of literacy.

In an interview in 2018 Nick Gibb added a reference to research conducted in 2000 in USA by the National Reading Panel. Readers are referred to an edited book by Allington (2002) which includes a critical appraisal of the phonics aspect of the National Reading Panel Research by members of the panel who raised concerns about claims made in and for that report. A summary of the evidence is available (in Clark, 2019: 11-12). The themes referred to by Allington have been analysed in work which has sought to investigate the connections between the political espousal of a strong emphasis on 'phonics first' and the rapid growth of both commercial programmes and of consultancy in schools. Such work identifies the power and ideological influences of consultants within policy and practice in the realm of reading, in particular of early reading in England (Ellis and Moss, 2014; Gunter and Mills). These themes and their influence on the perceptions of professionals and on practice in initial teacher education will be further explored in our research report in Chapter 5 (Clark et al, 2020 in press). It should be noted that a similar pattern can be identified within early reading policy in Australia as reported by several professional organisations there. In Reading the Evidence: synthetic phonics and literacy learning these developments in both England and in Australia are outlined, In the appendices the relevant documents, including those issued by UKLA, and ALEA and PETAA in Australia, are reprinted, showing that these associations were not opposed to the teaching of phonics as was being claimed by both governments (See Clark, 2017 including the Appendices, and Appendix III in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

In our independent survey of the views of teachers and parents on the Phonics Screening Check we found that many expressed disquiet at the effects of the pass-fail nature of the check, the requirement to re-sit the check should a child 'fail', the fact that half the words are non-words and the consequent emphasis on practising such words. Even many parents whose children had passed the check, or who could read, were disturbed at the negative effects on their children's reading as a consequence of the dominance of decoding in classrooms, particularly of non-words in preparation for the check. Many teachers thought the check should cease as it told them nothing they did not already know and both many teachers and parents thought that at least it should no longer be mandatory (Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

In view of this evidence it seems important to call for a consultation on the future of the Phonics Screening Check involving parents and teachers rather than allow this expenditure to continue unchallenged (see Appendix II in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

Initial teacher education in England since 2012

In 2012 Chief Inspector of Education Sir Michael Wilshaw issued an edict that: "Ofsted will sharpen its focus on phonics in routine inspections of all initial teacher education provision – primary, secondary and Further Education. Ofsted will start a series of unannounced inspections solely on the training of phonics teaching in providers of primary initial teacher education." (Clark, 2016: 127)

Evidence from professionals involved in initial teacher education and from newly qualified teachers reveals that many institutions involved in initial teacher education have narrowed their literacy courses to comply with this edict. Gardner who taught in a university in England from 2004 to 2012 as a teacher educator, experienced the government's determination to enforce this policy within universities involved in initial teacher education (see Gardner: 28 in Clark, 2017). Hendry in a recent article reports a study in which she observed teachers in training and interviewed them as they became newly qualified teachers (Hendry, 2020).

Her study commenced in 2013 which she claims marked an important change in the delivery of ITE in England: "University-led postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) routes were required to increase the number of days that

student teachers spent in school from 90 to 120 in their 38 week courses.... This change reflected government scepticism about universities' contribution to teacher preparation…and an emphasis on school led professional training rather than education for future teachers… As a consequence, university based time to engage with theory and pedagogy for teaching early reading was limited and the role of the school-based mentor became increasingly significant." (Hendry, 2020: 58)

In her study she found that: "The participants' experiences highlighted the focus on phonics teaching as the main priority in the teaching of reading in the 20 schools involved in the study. As a consequence the student teachers received limited examples of wider pedagogy and a rich environment for teaching reading….With one or two exceptions reading experiences were focused on phonetically decodable texts and phonics schemes."

She concluded that: "In essence when assessment and curriculum guidance prioritise one method for teaching reading, universities must work with schools, students and NQTs to re-establish a broader understanding of what it means to be an effective teacher of early reading." (Hendry: 67)

Government policy with regard to synthetic phonics is likely to have been prioritised since at least 2012 in courses of initial teacher education in England. We have been investigating this in our current research by an independent online survey which had responses from 38 professionals involved in initial teacher education in England and with interviews of ten of those who completed the online survey. We hope that our research will be available to read and download from the Newman website by April 2020 (Clark et al, 2020).

Initial teacher education inspection framework and handbook from 2020: Consultation Document issued January 2020 with responses by 3 April 2020

Since the completion of our research, in January 2020, Ofsted issued a consultation document on initial teacher education with the new policy to be implemented in September 2020 (Ofsted. 2020). It is stated: that: "36. We will judge fairly partnerships that take radically different approaches to the ITE curriculum. We recognise the importance of partnerships' autonomy to choose their own curriculum approaches. If leaders are able to show that they have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, then inspectors will assess the partnerships curriculum favourably." (9) "91.

Ofsted does not advocate that any particular teaching approach should be used exclusively with trainees….." (22) "The ITE curriculum is designed to equip trainees with up-to-date research findings, for example as outlined for primary and secondary phase trainees in the ITT core content framework." (40)

However, there are numerous quotations in the document referring to the need for institutions to require systematic synthetic phonics as the only way to teach early reading. Two examples of such statements are:
For primary phase, training will ensure that trainees learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics as outlined in the ITT core content framework and that trainees are not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence…39)

An institution will be deemed Inadequate if:
Primary training does not ensure that trainees only learn to teach reading using systematic synthetic phonics (44)

Under Leadership and management, on page 46, and again on page 47, reference is made to the need in the primary phase for: 'Thorough training in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics'.
On page 53 It is stated that leadership and management are likely to be inadequate if one or more of the following apply:
For early years and primary programmes mentors do not support the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. Some trainees (it is claimed) are being poorly prepared to teach systematic synthetic phonics after the completion of their course. (Ofsted, 2020)

There are no such edicts for any other subjects in primary or secondary schools in the document. No references are cited in the consultation document to justify this policy, removing as it does from professionals any freedom of choice in their presentation of literacy. Associated Ofsted/ DfE documents have long, and in some cases dated reference lists. None of the references refer specifically to evidence on synthetic phonics (DfE, 2019). Yet it would appear that following the recent Ofsted report Bold Beginnings, decoding, and in particular synthetic phonics, and preparation for the Phonics Screening Check may dominate reading in reception classes and years 1 and 2 in England and recently trained teachers will have had their initial teacher education courses in the institutions, and their observations in schools, dominated by synthetic phonics.

Should the proposed changes in initial teacher education be implemented in England in September 2020:

- Will tutors involved in literacy courses in initial teacher education retain any control over the content of their literacy courses?
- Will teachers in primary schools be equipped to critique this government mandated policy?
- Will teachers have any awareness of the approach to literacy teaching in other countries, or even that these may be different (even in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland)?

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Demitri Coryton

God and guns were not the answer to COVID-19 as politics, culture and religion vied with science as the pandemic gripped the world

By Demitri Coryton

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Abstract*: The science behind the COVID-19 pandemic that started in China in December 2019, spread to Europe and has now engulfed the world was the same the world over. Yet the response of governments differed widely, with politics, culture and religion playing an important part in some countries.*

Almost every country in the world closed down its schools, colleges and universities while attempting on-line learning with varying degrees of success, but it was the wide variation of other responses that decided how badly each country was hit by the on-going pandemic.

Keywords: coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, policy, schools

By definition, a pandemic is global and that is certainly the case with the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, which by the end of March 2020 was present in 196 countries and territories. Yet the way that countries are responding to COVID-19 differs considerably.

Even for those wanting to follow the science, like the British government, scientists did not agree on what the best course was. Some saw acquiring herd immunity as a priority. Others, and this included the World Health Organisation, stressed the importance of testing and isolating people right from the start. Yet not all governments have been motivated by public health concerns alone. Politics, religion and culture have all played their part in some countries. Few have followed the

example of many people in the United States, whose response to the virus was to rush out to buy more guns, with long queues outside gun shops, but politics and religion have both been negative factors in many countries.

Many populist and authoritarian governments have been reluctant to recognise the science, for a combination of political, cultural and religious reasons. President Trump initially dismissed COVID-19 as a hoax, and although he now admits that it isn't, he was talking about opening America up again by Easter, as if when the pandemic ends was up to him.

Brazil's wannabe Trump, President Bolsonaro, has also downplayed the seriousness of the virus, preferring to prioritise the economy. In March he suggested that he might end the quarantine regulations now in place and questioned the closure of schools. In Mexico, President Obrador, known locally by his initials as AMLO, declared that the virus would not attack Mexico and in a rejection of the science encouraged his fellow countrymen to continue with the Latin tradition of hugging and kissing friends and relatives.

The situation in much of the Muslim world is complicated by the view of the more fundamental religious leaders that the virus is an act of God that will not harm the pious, and a belief that the whole coronavirus pandemic is a western and particularly Jewish plot to undermine Islam. This is a popular view in Iran, which may go some way to explain why the disease took hold in Iran earlier than in its neighbours.

It's not just Muslim countries that think that the virus won't strike the pious. Russia has had many cases, and the more cases they had the more people packed into Orthodox churches. "You can't catch the virus in a church," explained, unbelievably, a doctor to the BBC on her way in to a church to worship. Evangelicals in the US are ignoring social distancing advice. The New York Times reported fear and confusion among students at the evangelical Liberty University in Virginia, who were told to come back to classes despite the public shutdown. In Christian communities in many countries, including Orthodox Romania and Georgia and Catholic Poland, local priests have urged the faithful to flock to church despite the advice of the state to stay at home and avoid public gatherings.

In Belarus, a former Soviet Union state, shops, markets and the borders remained open. President Alexander Lukashenko, in power since 1994 as Europe's last dictator, has

mocked what he calls the “panic” gripping countries that have imposed lockdowns to minimise deaths. “The world has gone mad from the coronavirus,” he told The Times. “This psychosis has crippled national economies almost everywhere in the world.” His recommendation for avoiding the virus was not isolation, but shots of vodka and hard work, especially on tractors. “Tractors will cure everyone! The field heals everyone” he said. Obviously it didn’t, and Lukashenko now faces the greatest challenge to his authority in his quarter century of power largely as a result of his mishandling of COVID-19. While it is too soon to predict the outcome of an American election campaign that still has three months to run, President Trump is well behind his Democrat rival Joe Biden in the polls, despite being ahead on the economy, because of his widely perceived poor performance in dealing with COVID. Politicians that have the misfortune to face an election during the COVID pandemic rarely come out ahead.

In Asia, Turkey seemed on the face of it to have responded well. The government of President Erdogan closed their borders, especially that with Iran, closed down public gatherings including the enormously popular football season, ordered most businesses to close and launched an effective education campaign to keep Turks isolated in their homes. Yet in Turkey everything is seen through the prism of politics, of pro or anti Erdogan. Pro-government media claimed that the virus was part of a plot to undermine Erdogan. Social media was full of Islamist and antisemitic explanations. "Jews manufactured and spread the virus to end western civilization", "The virus is only a minor part of a bigger game that targets Turkey" and "The virus was created to overthrow Erdoğan, leader of the umma" are just a few examples.

Turkey’s apparently good figures on infection turn out under closer examination to be less healthy. The limited number of cases are down to the limited number of tests carried out. Here, Erdogan has something in common with Trump, who also blamed the increase in infections on greater testing. For Trump, coronavirus is not primarily a public health threat. It is a political threat to his re-election chances. He is therefore more concerned about limiting the impact on the economy, as his re-election was predicated on what until the pandemic was an apparently successful and booming economy.

United States

What happens in the United States matters more to the world than the situation in any other country. It is still the world's biggest economy, and is far more open than China, the second biggest global economy. In March President Trump and Congress agreed a $2 trillion economic package which helped to steady the collapsing markets, but the response of the American government has been erratic and confused. It is America's misfortune, and the world's, that the USA has the least qualified person to be president in its entire history. Trump is notoriously ignorant and sceptical about science, as his positions on climate change show. He started by just not believing that COVID-19 was a serious threat, and now does not believe the modelling that his and international experts have done.

A good example of this was the modelling of Professor Neil Ferguson of Imperial College, London, whose predictions of an estimated half a million deaths in the UK and 2.2 million deaths in the USA if nothing was done sent shock waves through the British government and resulted in a change of policy in Britain. Ferguson stressed the essential need for public health policies of isolation, getting people to stay at home and shutting down education establishments and much of the economy as the only way of saving large numbers of lives. This was bad news for Trump, who had been urging Americans to continue with normal life and keep working. For a short while the Ferguson modelling stopped Trump dead in his tracks and something of a shut-down followed in America.

Yet that soon changed. The pro-Trump media, like the TV channel Fox News, has reflected the Trump view that the choice is between saving the American economy or a few lives, and Trump supporters have followed this line with social media full of attacks on Ferguson. It has been quite wrongly claimed that Ferguson amended his figures downwards as a correction. What he had said is that if the right measures were adopted then deaths would greatly reduce. Trumpworld incorrectly reported this as Ferguson correcting his original estimates. As Trump's coronavirus task force coordinator, Dr Deborah Birx, observed of Ferguson: "I'm sure many of you saw the recent report out of the U.K. about them adjusting. If you remember, that was the report that said there would be 500,000 deaths in the U.K. and 2.2 million deaths in the United States. They've adjusted that number in the U.K. to 20,000. So half a million to

20,000. We're looking into this in great detail to understand that adjustment." There was no mention that the 20,000 figure was not an adjustment, but a prediction of what would happen only if a full lock-down was implemented.

Trump has his own experts which he can also ignore. For example, in March the University of Washington's School of Medicine and its Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation published a forecast that predicted a national peak in daily U.S. deaths that will occur in mid-April, with the end of the curve following in June. The model made a number of assumptions, the main one of which was that all remaining states that had not enacted strict restrictions on residents would do so in the week that followed once they saw how grave the situation was in areas like New York. Yet Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Republican, refused to issue orders for people to stay at home. Alabama's Republican governor also resisted while the Republican governor of Mississippi issued an order defining almost all businesses as "essential", including bars and restaurants closed down almost everywhere else. The University of Washington model assumes the entire country would maintain these strict restrictions until the summer. This did not happen, so infections surged and are now (September 2020) surging towards six million.

In his desperate attempt to reopen the economy, in March unveiled a plan to identify specific counties that he thought should reopen sooner than others. His own experts have dismissed the idea that you can identify on a county basis when to ease restrictions without sending the infection rate soaring again. Yet increasingly Trump supporters are pushing back. The Washington Post has reported that "a growing contingent of Trump supporters have pushed the narrative that health experts are part of a deep-state plot to hurt Trump's re-election efforts by damaging the economy and keeping America shut down as long as possible."

The University of Washington model predicted that this first wave of infections would end by the summer, with a second or even third wave a possibility. It predicted a death toll during this first wave of between 38,000 and 162,000 – which is a lower projection than some earlier models. But the actual death count will largely depend on how badly hospitals are overwhelmed and whether they receive supplies like ventilators that they desperately need. America has a very poor public health system, locally controlled and with huge variations in

quality and funding between different hospitals serving different sections of the population. National direction is impossible, and public support for the private enterprise basis of health care strong.

Again, Trump's science-sceptical approach is hindering America's response to COVID-19. His reaction to the Ferguson and Washington University projections was to tell Fox News: "I have a feeling that a lot of the numbers that are being said in some areas are just bigger than they're going to be." He also cast doubt on the need for ventilators, telling Fox News: "I don't believe you need 40,000 or 30,000 ventilators. You know, you go into major hospitals, sometimes they'll have two ventilators, and now all of a sudden they're saying, 'Can we order 30,000 ventilators?'" Yet he then invoked the Defence Production Act to order General Motors to make the machines, which it has no experience of doing and was reluctant to take on.

Trump has a clear political imperative to ease if not end restrictions to get the American economy going again in time for the November elections. As a result America now has the largest number of infections in the world.

In 2007 the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a paper, Nonpharmaceutical Interventions Implemented by US Cities During the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic, which analysed the effect of nonpharmaceutical interventions for epidemic mitigation in 43 cities in the USA over six months in the 1918-1920 flu pandemic, which started in the USA. It sought to determine whether city-to-city variation in mortality was associated with the timing, duration, and combination of nonpharmaceutical interventions. It was.

The paper found that there were 115,340 deaths in the 43 cities during the 24 weeks analysed. Every city had adopted at least one of the three major categories of nonpharmaceutical interventions. School closure and public gathering bans activated concurrently represented the most common combination implemented in 34 cities (79%). The cities that implemented nonpharmaceutical interventions earlier had greater delays in reaching peak mortality. There was a statistically significant association between increased duration of nonpharmaceutical interventions and a reduced total death rate. The paper concluded that: "These findings demonstrate a strong association between early, sustained, and layered application of nonpharmaceutical interventions and mitigating the consequences of the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic in the

United States."

COVID-19 is not flu, as the 1918 pandemic was, yet the 2007 study provides compelling evidence in support of the present findings of both Professor Ferguson in the UK and the University of Washington study in the USA. Closing down schools, colleges and universities (in the physical sense) and public gatherings including most work places as quickly as possible was a key part of the initial reaction to the 1918 pandemic as it was to the present COVID pandemic. As we are now finding, the difficulty is easing off these restrictions for both students returning to their studies and people returning to work. What the 2007 study found was that in 1919 those US cities that eased off too quickly, like St Louis, saw infections and deaths shoot back up again and kill more people in the second wave than died in the first wave. That also happened in the UK, where the second wave was the most deadly of the three.

We don't know for sure how many waves of COVID-19 there will be or what the final tally of death and long-term harm to health for some of those that survive the virus will be. America is a large and federal country where education is a state and local responsibility and where, outside overall economic policy, defence and foreign affairs, the federal government has limited power. American states have been competing with each other in trying to purchase extra supplies like ventilators, with New York having to pay ten times the normal price to try and secure supplies. Mark Levine, the chairman of the New York City Health Committee, described the situation as "just insane." What the Canadian and Oxford historian Margaret Macmillan called the age-old distrust of the American people for their federal government is compounded by the US having a president manifestly ill-qualified for the top job in government. Many American states won't follow Trump, but enough will, in what is a very divided society, for the pandemic to last longer and kill many more people than it might have done. America is by no means alone, with a new surge in cases in France and Spain while India has set a new and unwanted record in new cases. But America is still the biggest economy in the world, and it is entering a recession deeper than it need have been. And that will impact negatively on the whole world.

What did the research evidence tell us about the effect of closing and reopening schools during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic?

Demitri Coryton

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By Demitri Coryton

Abstract*: By March 2020 almost every country in the world had closed its schools, colleges and universities, at least physically, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was hugely disruptive to the education of children and young people, and to the lives of their parents at least one of whom, usually the mother, who had to stay at home to look after the younger one. So what was the research evidence that these decisions were based on?*

Mainly, educational settings were closed on the basis of previous dealings with flu pandemics, for which young people were super spreaders. Yet COVID-19 was not influenza. It was a coronavirus that impacted young people far less than any other age group, although in March 2020 very little was known about it.

Keywords: coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, policy, schools

In March 2020, when most countries in the world began shutting down their schools, colleges and universities, what did the research evidence tell us about the effect of closing and reopening schools during the coronavirus pandemic? The short answer was nothing, or at least nothing conclusive. This is alarming when policy is meant to be evidence driven. The long answer is more nuanced.

The reason is that so little was known about the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which

is the virus that gives people the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). It is a new virus (novel coronavirus) so no research had been done into it when it burst out of China at the start of 2020.

Yet by the middle of March 107 countries had implemented national school closures, involving 862 million children and young people, which is roughly half the global student population. (1) This was despite it being unknown whether such school measures were effective in countering not just the new SARS-CoV-2, but also the older coronaviruses like the earlier severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS).

Time and again when looking at medical research papers on SARS-CoV-2 in the early part of 2020 the point is made that very little was known about it. We therefore have to widen our net and look at research on other coronaviruses like the original SARS and MERS, but that does not add a great deal. Policy makers were therefore thrown back on looking at other pandemics, in particular the influenza pandemics going back to the last great catastrophic pandemic, that of 1918 to 1920. However, one has to keep in mind that COVID-19 is not flu and that we are not in 1918.

In this paper we look at a number of studies, including the recent *School Closure and Management Practices During Coronavirus Outbreaks Including COVID-19: A rapid systemic review,* published on-line in *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health* on 6 April 2020 (2); and *Nonpharmaceutical Interventions Implemented by US Cities During the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic,* published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on 21 November 2007. (3)

The main reason why there is so little evidence on the effectiveness of school closures during pandemics is because the closure of schools is very rarely undertaken on its own. It is part of a suite of things that governments can do, and it can be difficult to identify how much each one contributed to the result.

The case for school closures is based mainly on evidence from influenza pandemics where they are seen to reduce contacts between students and therefore interrupt the transmission of the disease. (4) However, influenza spreads rapidly among young people and school closures are therefore effective in countering flu pandemics. COVID-19 spreads far less among the young. A very small number of young children have died from COVID-19, but it has more serious effects on

older people. The death rate is highest among men over 80 with underlying health issues. It appears that infection among most young people results in mild symptoms, sometimes so mild that those infected do not know they have COVID-19. However, in March and April we knew so little about COVID-19 and although our knowledge has increased greatly over the last six months we still can't rule out that those of school age are just as capable of catching COVID-19 and transmitting it to others including adults who may display far more serious symptoms than the young people they catch COVID-19 from. While some previous coronavirus outbreaks may have resulted in little or even no transition among school students, it cannot be assumed that that will also be the case with COVID-19. A report in April suggesting that children of all ages presenting with a multisystem inflammatory state requiring intensive care across London and also in other regions of the UK was a warning that we cannot assume that COVID-19 is largely harmless in children.

Closing schools and colleges is a two-edged sword. As part of a policy of social isolation it will keep transmission down and thereby result in a lower death rate. However, it also results in a large number of parents or other family members having to look after children who would otherwise be at school, and this will include a significant number of people who work in the National Health Service. It tends to be mothers who have to care for children and the NHS employs a disproportionate number of women with children. During this pandemic some schools have remained open to provide child care for health service and other key workers, although take-up has not been as great as the Government had expected as some parents fear their children will not be safe from the virus at school.

Studies of school children in the UK have shown that the mean number of daily social contacts during school holidays are half those of normal term times. (5, 6) However, contacts continue and mixing between children and adults and between children at different schools actually increases during holidays and school closures. (7). An evidence review of school closures published in March concluded that "evidence suggests that many children continue to leave the house and mix with others during school closures despite public health recommendations to avoid social contact." (8) The review in *The Lancet* in April noted that evidence for school closures came "almost entirely from influenza outbreaks" where

transmission is driven by children, while “it is unclear whether school measures are effective in coronavirus outbreaks” including SARS, MERS and COVID-19 “for which transmission dynamics appear to be different.” (9) This systemic review observed that “reviews of the effects of school closure on influenza outbreaks or pandemics suggest that school closure can be a useful control measure, although the effectiveness of mass school closures is often low. (10) A review commissioned by the Department of Health in 2014 concluded that school closures can reduce transmission of disease if instituted early enough in an outbreak, although this review was looking at influenza epidemics. (11)

There have been a number of other reviews and studies on school closure, mainly during influenza epidemics, that have shown that school closures, almost always as part of a wider set of policies, do have a positive effect on slowing disease transmission, although the range of effect was wide. However, as Professor Viner and his team observed in the *Lancet* , “there was substantial evidence that transmission surged again once schools reopened, and there was little consensus on the appropriate timing of closures, let alone reopening of schools.” (12)

Economic impact

Whatever the health impact of school closures there is a considerable economic and educational impact that is entirely negative. A paper published in 2008 estimated that 16% of the workforce are the primary caregivers for children, a figure that rises to 30% in the health and social care sectors. (13) A more recent study in the USA found a similar situation, with 29% of health care workers having childcare obligations. (14) Unless alternative childcare provision is made for these workers, then high levels of absenteeism will result.

A 2010 economic modelling analysis of school closures, during influenza rather than coronavirus outbreaks, suggested that 4-week or 13-week closures reduced the clinical attack rate minimally but markedly increased the economic cost to the nation, in particular through forced absenteeism by working parents, in the UK, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Costs were estimated to be up to 1% of GDP in the UK for school closure for 12–13 weeks. (15) Another study predicted up to 3% of GDP would be lost for an 8-week closure. (16) The *Lancet* review found that “reviews have not summarised

economic harms from school closure in detail, but economic modelling from an influenza outbreak in Hong Kong, China, suggested that the most cost-effective models were selective local closures rather than city-wide closures." (17)

Yet this is not something that is entirely in the control of the state. If schools were not closed during an epidemic, many parents would withdraw their children from school as a precaution with consequent problems of absenteeism among parents. Some schools would be forced to close because of staff absences, whether caused by illness or teachers taking time off to look after their own children.

Alternatives to full closure

There are a range of alternative social distancing actions short of system closure that could be utilised, although none of the few studies into these have been conducted in the UK. These include suspending affected classes or even year groups, changing the school organisation structure to reduce student mixing by such things as closing playgrounds, cancelling non-essential meetings or gatherings, keeping students in the same classroom, increasing the space between students, shortening the school day or week and staggering the start of the school day or the lunch period. A small number of modelling studies based on practice in other counties suggests that they could be effective, at least during flu pandemics, as a social distancing measure while reducing social and economic disruption. However the studies were few and none were directly relevant to the UK.

There are several theoretical reasons why school closures might be less effective in COVID-19 than in influenza outbreaks. Children contribute more to influenza transmission than do adults, with low levels of immunity and high levels of transmission due to symptomatic disease. However, in the COVID-19 pandemic thus far, children appear to form a much lower proportion of cases than expected from their population, although evidence for this is mixed and some data suggest that children might be as likely to be infected as adults but largely remain asymptomatic or have a mild form of the disease. In some previous coronavirus outbreaks, evidence suggested that transmission in schools was very low or absent. As modelling studies of school closures for influenza outbreaks rely on assumptions about the proportion of cases transmitted in schools being relatively high, these models cannot be assumed

to be informative regarding effectiveness for COVID-19.

Looking at how China reacted to the COVID-19 outbreak, emerging epidemiological data suggest little evidence of transmission of COVID-19 through schools, although this might reflect closure of schools during most of the outbreak. On the other hand in Taiwan (Republic of China) which has been recognised to have effectively minimised spread of COVID-19, national policies avoided widespread planned school closures and instead mandated initially local class closures, and subsequently local temporary school closures, based on low thresholds for infected cases within individual schools.

Effectiveness of school closures against COVID-19

With COVID-19 being a new disease little is known about it. So what is known about the use of and effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of school closure and other school social distancing practices on infection rates and transmission during coronavirus outbreaks?

COVID-19 began in China, where school closures were initiated nationally across the whole country, and not just in Wuhan province which was the worst affected area, in late January, 2020. This was mainly done by delaying the restarting of schools after the Chinese New Year holidays. This was achieved as part of a broader series of control measures during the epidemic. No data are available on the effectiveness of school closure as there was little variation in timing of closures (they were reportedly applied in all Chinese cities uniformly and without delay) and school closures were part of a broad range of quarantine and social distancing measures. Studies in March 2020 concluded that the overall package of quarantine and social distancing was effective in reducing the epidemic in mainland China, although the relative contribution of school closures was not assessed. (18)

Of all the various studies of counter measures during the pandemic, only one examined the effect of school closures separately to other social distancing measures. This was from Professor Neil Ferguson and colleagues from Imperial College, London. (19) Professor Ferguson is a senior advisor to the British Government on COVID-19 and a member of its SAGE (Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies). His modelling was instrumental in changing British Government policy and had a major impact on policy in the USA.

Ferguson's group at Imperial modelled the estimated

effects of a range of different social distancing measures and combinations of measures. In the words of the *Lancet* paper published in April: "They used UK population and schools data together with data on transmission dynamics reported from the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan. Using data from previous influenza outbreaks, they assumed that per-capita contacts within schools were double those in households, workplaces, or the community, and that, overall, approximately a third of transmission occurred in schools. They modelled a scenario in which all schools and 25% of universities were closed and where the effect on non-school social contacts was an increase of 50% in household contact rates for families with children and a 25% increase in community contacts during the closure. They concluded that school closure as an isolated measure was predicted to reduce total deaths by around 2–4% during a COVID-19 outbreak in the UK, whereas single measures such as case isolation would be more effective, and a combination of measures would be the most effective. The authors concluded that school closure is predicted to be insufficient to mitigate (never mind suppress) the COVID-19 pandemic in isolation, which is in contrast to seasonal influenza epidemics where children are the key drivers of transmission." (20)

There are few data available from the literature on the small number of coronavirus outbreaks to guide countries on the use of school closures or other school social distancing practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Available evidence is consistent with a broad range of impacts of school closures, from little effect on reducing transmission through to more substantial effects. Yet, the educational and economic costs and potential harms of school closure are clearly substantial.

As evidence from coronavirus outbreak control is scarce, we must turn to evidence for the benefits of school closures from influenza epidemics and pandemics. School closures have been widespread in some countries during influenza pandemics, and many studies report important effects on reducing transmission and the size of the pandemic.

The *Lancet* review published in April concluded that: "Currently, the evidence to support national closure of schools to combat COVID-19 is very weak and data from influenza outbreaks suggest that school closures could have relatively small effects on a virus with COVID-19's high transmissibility and apparent low clinical effect on school children. At the same time, these data also show that school closures can have

profound economic and social consequences. More research is urgently needed on the effectiveness of school closures and other school social distancing practices to inform policies related to COVID-19. We also need more detailed knowledge about how COVID-19 affects children and young people, as the role of school measures in reducing COVID-19 transmission depends on the susceptibility of children to infection and their infectiousness once infected. However, observational studies might be uninformative if closures are national and implemented at the same time as other mitigation measures. Better learning might come from countries that have instituted later or subnational closures. Modelling studies—particularly those parameterised for COVID-19 in children, and those that can consider interaction with other contextual factors (eg, timing, parents working from home, and additional social mixing as a consequence of school closures) or different strategies (national vs staged roll out)—are likely to be more informative and are urgently needed. These findings pose a dilemma for policy makers seeking measures to protect populations. School closure presents an apparently common-sense method of dramatically reducing spread of disease and the evidence from previous influenza outbreaks appears compelling. However, policy makers need to be aware of the equivocal evidence when proposing or implementing national or regional school closures for COVID-19, given the very high costs of lengthy school closures during pandemics."

It further concluded: "Nonetheless, in a context of high rates of staff absence through disease, school systems will be under strain and schools remaining open only for the children of health-care and other essential workers might be a better strategy than a haphazard process of schools closing and therefore providing no childcare for any essential workers." (21)

As we have noted, the scale and speed of school closures are unprecedented globally. It is unclear how long countries can maintain tight suppression measures before behavioural fatigue in the population occurs. Professor Ferguson's modelling suggests that social distancing measures might need to be in place for many months or even years. (22) There is clearly an urgent need to identify how countries can safely return students to education and parents to work, a problem that we face now at the start of a new school year (August/September 2020.) As the number of COVID-19 cases have fallen, and in particular the number of hospitalisations and

deaths have greatly reduced, education settings are going back for physical opening and governments are reluctant to close them down again. A pre-requisite for the reopening of education settings, and indeed the economy, is the ability to undertake more testing and tracing than Britain currently can do. The UK government has invested a lot in a centralised outsourced track and trace system, which it has spent half a billion pounds on, when it is increasingly apparent that it is local Directors of Public Health and their local authority-based teams that are the only effective way of doing this.

The *Lancet* review also recommended that policy makers and researchers should look at other school social distancing interventions that are much less disruptive than full school closure and might substantially contribute to maintaining the control of this pandemic. "Although strong evidence is not available for the effectiveness of these practices, they might be implementable with much less disruption, financial costs, or harms. Modelling and observational studies are urgently needed to guide policy on the opening of schools once the pandemic is under control." (23)

The 1918 pandemic

As we have seen, evidence from coronavirus pandemics is limited and we therefore need to include research on influenza pandemics. None is more well known and thoroughly researched than that of 1918 to 1920, the so-called Spanish flu (which had nothing in particular to do with Spain, starting instead in the USA.) This was described in the *Lancet* as "the most deadly contagious calamity in human history. Approximately 40 million individuals died worldwide." (24)

In 2007 the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a paper by Howard Markel et al that looked in detail at how 43 American cities had reacted to the pandemic. (3) It noted that "the historical record demonstrates that when faced with a devastating pandemic, many nations, communities, and individuals adopt what they perceive to be effective social distancing measures or nonpharmaceutical interventions including isolation of those who are ill, quarantine of those suspected of having contact with those who are ill, school and selected business closure, and public gathering cancellations." (25) All these measures have been implemented in the UK and around the world in the present COVID-19 pandemic. Can we learn anything relevant to the present from the actions of a

century ago?

Markel and his colleagues observed that “a growing body of theoretical modelling research suggests that nonpharmaceutical interventions might play a salubrious role in delaying the temporal effect of a pandemic; reducing the overall and peak attack rate; and reducing the number of cumulative deaths. Such measures could potentially provide valuable time for production and distribution of pandemic-strain vaccine and antiviral medication. Optimally, appropriate implementation of nonpharmaceutical interventions would decrease the burden on healthcare services and critical infrastructure.” (26) Their study covered part of the second and third waves of the 1918 pandemic, which represented the principal time span of activation and deactivation of non-pharmaceutical interventions. The 43 cities had a combined population of 23 million, accounting for 22% of the population of the USA at that time. The USA is a good country to study, as public health is a state or city responsibility with few powers then in place for the federal government. Different cities could and did follow different policies.

Three cities never officially closed their entire school system. These were New York, New Haven and Chicago. 25 cities closed their schools once, 14 closed them twice, and one, Kansas City, closed its schools three times during the six months of the review. Schools were officially closed a median of six weeks (range, 0-15 weeks). The research noted a range of nonpharmaceutical actions involving schools and other settings like public gatherings and quarantining. There were 22 cities whose only action was to close their schools. (27)

The researchers noted that “all 43 cities eventually implemented nonpharmaceutical interventions but the time of activation, duration, and choice or combination of these nonpharmaceutical interventions appear to have been key factors in their success or failure.” (28)

The researchers concluded that “late interventions, regardless of their duration or permutation of use, almost always were associated with worse outcomes. However, timing alone was not consistently associated with success. The combination and choice of nonpharmaceutical interventions also appeared to be critical”. The researchers also concluded that “the 1918 experience suggests that sustained nonpharmaceutical interventions are beneficial and need to be ‘on’ throughout the particular peak of a local experience.” (29)

The research further concluded that: “These findings demonstrate a strong association between early, sustained, and layered application of nonpharmaceutical interventions and mitigating the consequences of the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic in the United States.” (30)

Importantly, the researchers claimed that their “retrospective study is consistent with the results from recent theoretical models of the spread of a contemporary pandemic, which highlight the value of early, combined, and sustained nonpharmaceutical interventions to mitigate a pandemic”. (31) This study was not just of interest to historians. It had relevance to pandemic planning in 2007 and to the present pandemic, although again one must stress that 1918 was a flu pandemic and 2020 is a coronavirus pandemic, so the two are not identical.

Education

School and college closures during a pandemic is primarily a public health issue, but it is also an education and child protection issue. What are the educational effects of prolonged school and college closure? According to the New Zealand Professor John Hattie, Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia, the answer for most children is not much. In *Visible Learning Effect Sizes When Schools Are Closed: What Matters and What Does Not*, a paper published in April, Professor Hattie concluded that for most children “the effects from school holiday are very small on students, and there is little reason to believe that the length of the school year has much effect at all ... There is data on the effect of teacher strikes and lengthy shut outs—and again the message is that the effects are very low, especially for students below middle school, but they increase after middle school, especially in maths.” (32)

He gives the effects of the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2011, which severely disrupted access to schools. The performance of Christchurch students actually went up. He believes that this was because “teachers tailored learning more to what students could NOT do, whereas often school is about what teachers think students need, even if students can already do the tasks.” (33).

The paediatrician Dr Alasdair Munro has observed that children consistently make up under 2% of COVID-19 cases, at least of those people tested in hospital. In a twitter thread on 20

April he gave examples from a number of countries including the USA, Spain, Italy and China which all pointed to extremely low infection rates in young children. These ranged from 0.6% of a Chinese cohort needing paediatric intensive care unit support (PICU) to 2% admissions to PICU in the USA (in a study with limited data). In some tests of general populations, in Iceland and even in part of Italy, the number of children under 10 testing positive for COVID-19 was zero. (34)

Set against this, also in April it was reported in *Health Service Journal* that the NHS has issued an urgent alert to GPs warning of a spike in the number of children being admitted to intensive care with a new COVID-19 related inflammatory syndrome. The alert warned that in the "last three weeks, there has been an apparent rise in the number of children of all ages presenting with a multisystem inflammatory state requiring intensive care across London and also in other regions of the UK". It adds: "There is a growing concern that a [COVID-19] related inflammatory syndrome is emerging in children in the UK, or that there may be another, as yet unidentified, infectious pathogen associated with these cases." (35) It is too early to be sure whether this is COVID-19 or something like it, but it does demonstrate again that there is a great deal about COVID-19 that we don't yet know.

Professor Hattie argues that most children can miss ten weeks of term-time schooling without any undue effect. However, there are some exceptions. Children with special educational needs who require specialised teaching, those who already do not like learning at school and those whose primary motivation for being at school is to be with friends and who have a negative view of learning. It must also be recognised that children from the poorest communities will be further disadvantaged by closing schools and colleges. Some will not have the technical resources for home learning, and certainly not at the same standard as richer families. Some schools are already offering poorer students the loan of things like tablets, but the temptation to just sell the tablets will be difficult to resist for those for whom poverty and hunger have been made worse by this crisis.

The effects of inequality among parents and therefore their children are well documented. As a briefing note in April from the Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities at University College London noted, "there are many potential layers of influence that cause inequalities in the

home learning environment, including low levels of parental education and household income constraints. Research consistently demonstrates a strong intergenerational association between these parental factors and child outcomes. Families from lower socio-economic backgrounds with lower levels of parental education and household income, coupled with the stress of living in poverty (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002), may experience several challenges in supporting their child's home learning. For example, limited access to resources, including technological devices that can be used to facilitate learning and a reliable and fast Internet connection. Low levels of adult numeracy and literacy, as well as anxieties towards learning, particularly in mathematics, may also pose significant challenges for parents/caregivers supporting their child's home learning during school closures. Current evidence suggests it is important to focus on the quality of children's home learning, rather than simply the quantity." (36)

The other concern is vulnerable children. Government policy has been to keep some schools open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers. As the Scottish Children's Services Coalition noted in April, "just under 1% of school children are at childcare hubs and of those attending, 86% are the children of key workers, while only 14% are vulnerable children. These are very small numbers, reflecting the fact that only a tiny fraction of vulnerable children are taking up these places and should set alarm bells ringing." (37) The number of vulnerable children attending what are more child care than education settings are fewer than the number that the Government hoped would turn up.

There is some evidence of an increase in domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse as people were forced to lock down in what may be cramped living conditions, with the BBC's *Newsnight* reporting that some adults were using the pandemic as cover to increase child abuse. Children for whom school is a place of safety were not being kept safe.

A great deal of effort has gone into making teaching materials available on-line, and schools and colleges did what they could to increase what they do at a distance. The results, however, were patchy and independent schools, catering for much richer parents, did far better than state schools. The climate for learning at home matters and parents can help enormously, but parents are not teachers. Unless they are teachers themselves, parents will not have the skills that

teachers have or the knowledge that, depending on the child's age, a range of teachers would normally bring to a child's education. What teachers do matters, whatever medium they are able to use.

Where we are today

The research evidence would suggest that young children are much less likely to be infected with COVID-19 than any other part of the population, unlike the situation with influenza pandemics. We do not yet know enough about COVID-19 to be certain whether they can spread it to adults, but it may be that they can and that will put teachers at risk now that schools are returning. Older children can and do get COVID-19, although for most at a lower and milder rate than adults.

School closure has been an important part of the lock-down that has undoubtedly allowed the UK to "flatten the curve" and prevent the NHS from being swamped. The fear, expressed by government ministers and their scientific advisers and the OECD, is that lifting the lock-down prematurely will lead to a spike in cases and the need for a further lock-down to protect the NHS and avoid unacceptable levels of death.

There was much speculation in the media about an exit strategy from the lock-down, although ministers have been much more reticent than backbench MPs and commentators desperate to be noticed. The closure of schools, apart from the provision for children of key workers and vulnerable children, continued throughout the summer term and it is only now, in September (August in Scotland) that with some trepidation, schools and colleges are attempting to reopen.

Britain was slow to act at the beginning of this crisis. As the *Guardian* reported, as of 12 March "almost every country (in Europe) had employed nationwide or regional school closures while the UK's schools remained open." They soon closed. While one or two countries like Denmark led the way in reopening their schools there was no sign that Britain wanted to lead this particular move.

This caution is supported by the OECD, whose Secretary General, Angel Gurria, told the BBC in April that the health versus economy argument was a false one. "You have to do both, but health first," he said. Once the number of infections and deaths stabilised then you could open up the economy unless there was another spike in cases. Governments had a duty to protect life first. "Err on the side of prudence," Mr Gurria

said. (38)

That is exactly what the British government, and the devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, did. Schools and colleges were kept closed for months when the evolving research evidence did not really support this at least as far as the children were concerned. But educational settings are not just about children. They are community centres with the risk of spreading COVID-19 among adults including parents and the quite substantial number of adults that interact with schools. There is still not concensus among scientists on how far opening up educational settlings should go. Independent SAGE, for example, published a report at the end of August 2020 recommending against the physical return of universities in October. (39)

Apart from in Scotland, schools in the rest of the UK have not been open long enough at the time of writing (early September 2020) for any data to be available, but in the second half of August, as the economy was gradually reopened, the R rate of infection crept above the all-important 1.0 above which the rate of infection of COVID-19 increases. It will be almost impossible to sererate out how much of the increase in R which looks likely will be due to reopening schools and colleges (it may be quite a bit in university towns) but without an effective track and trace system, which is still lacking especially in England, we are already seeing an increase in cases. It is at nothing like the level of last April and May, and the number of hospitalisations and deaths is actually going down as new cases are mainly in younger people who don't end up in hospital, but local lockdowns are already in place in Leicester and parts of the North West and Glasgow, and are likely to be a feature across Britain for some while. It looks as if the Government will only close schools and colleges as a last resort, and that is what the evidence suggests is the right course of action.

Notes

(1) UNESCO. COVID-19 educational disruption and response. 2020. https://en. unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-schoolclosures (accessed March 19, 2020). The week before only 29 countries had closed their schools.

(2) *School Closure and Management Practices During Coronavirus Outbreaks Including COVID-19: A rapid systemic review*, by Prof R M Viner PhD, S J Russell PhD, H Croker PhD, J Packer MEpi, J Ward MBBS, UCL Institute of Education; C Stansfield PhD, University College London, London, UK; O Mytton PhD, MRC Epidemiology Unit, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK; C Bonell PhD, Public Health and Policy, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, UK; and Prof R Booy MD, National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia; published on-line in *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health* on 6 April 2020.

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(4) *The relationship between school holidays and transmission of influenza in England and Wales* by Jackson C, Vynnycky E, Mangtani P; in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2016; 184: 644–51.

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(10) Ibid. page 1.

(11) *Impact of school closures on an influenza pandemic: scientific evidence base review.* Jackson C, Mangtani P, Vynnycky E. Public Health England, London, 2014.

(12) *School Closure* ..., Prof R M Viner et al, *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, page 1.

(13) *Estimating the costs of school closure for mitigating an influenza pandemic*. Sadique MZ, Adams EJ, Edmunds WJ. *BMC Public Health* 2008; 8: 135.

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(18) *The impact of transmission control measures during the*

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(20) *School Closure* …, Prof R M Viner et al, *The Lancet Child and Adolescent Health,* page 5.

(21) Ibid. page 6.

(22) *Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions* … Ferguson NM, et al. Imperial College, 2020.

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(26) Ibid. page 645.

(27) Ibid. page 648, in particular table 2.

(28) Ibid. page 650.

(29) Ibid. page 651.

(30) Ibid. page 644.

(31) Ibid. page 653.

(32) *Visible Learning Effect Sizes When Schools Are Closed: What Matters and What Does Not* , Professor John Hattie, paper posted on-line April 2020, page 1. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cbI-myWJEg2ZtJ-L3uoLKUGplYcuJCZO/view?fbclid=IwAR3Rn4SwhXa_99_Zith4-Q8upN4WV7X4bR63JY1Kx4bTiDFS7UtHGH0iKWA

(33) Ibid. page 1.

(34) Alistair Munro @apsmunro, 20 April 2020, and https://dontforgetthebubbles.com/

(35) *Health Service Journal,* 27 April 2020.

(36) *Briefing Note: Inequalities in Resources in the Home Learning Environment,* Laura Outhwaite, Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities, University College London, April 2020.

(37) Statement from the Scottish Children's Services Coalition, Wednesday 22 April 2020.

(38) Interview with Angel Gurria, Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), BBC2 *Newsnight*, 21 April 2020.

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Matt Bezzant

Education and COVID-19: What could the UK Government learn from other countries?

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Abstract: *On Sunday 10 May, the British Government announced a roadmap for the partial reopening of schools in England, with the hope of primary schools reopening for all Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 as early as June. The Government also hopes that, if the reproduction rate for coronavirus remains low, all those with exams next year, Years 10 and 12, would return to school from July. That did not happen. What could the UK Government have learned from the actions taken in other countries?*

Keywords: coronavirus, schools, OECD, PISA, NFER.

In April, the OECD published *A Framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, by Fernando M. Reimers, Global Education Innovation Initiative, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Andreas Schleicher, Directorate of Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. This followed a rapid assessment of education needs and emerging responses in 98 countries, including the UK, and described the challenges based on analysis of data from PISA 2018, which was delivered in the UK by NFER.

As set-out in the OECD guide, it is generally agreed that social distancing will continue for an extended period of time after nationwide lockdowns are lifted. This will continue to limit opportunities for students to learn, and is likely to disproportionately impact on more disadvantaged learners, as Ofsted's Chief Inspector recently told MPs in a Select

Committee hearing. It is therefore important that children and young people can return to school as soon as possible, whilst balancing this with the risk of further spreading the disease.

In April, the vast majority of governments around the world had directed schools to close. The majority of respondents to the OECD survey indicated that they believed it was critical to ensure the continuity of academic learning for students, to provide professional support and advice to teachers, to ensure the well-being of teachers and students, and to support students who lack skills for independent study during lockdown. However, respondents also acknowledged that ensuring the continuity of learning and supporting students that lack skills for independent studies were amongst the most challenging priorities to address.

A large percentage of respondents to the OECD survey stated that governments had done nothing to support the ongoing academic instruction of students, whilst some stated that clear plans with an implementation strategy had been provided. For example, some countries have provided online teaching materials, broadcasted educational programmes on national television, and set-up communication tools for teachers to interact with students remotely. Moreover, the majority of respondents said that no prioritisation of the curriculum had taken place.

Not all students' home environments were suited for home learning, even before the pandemic. Analysis of the PISA 2018 findings shows that in the UK, on average, over 10% of students do not have a quiet place to study, with that number being higher for disadvantaged students. Furthermore, over 10% of disadvantaged students do not have access to a computer for schoolwork, and a small percentage of all students do not have access to internet.

Analysis of the PISA 2018 results show how prepared different countries were for effective online learning. In the UK, less than 70% of school leaders agreed that their schools had an effective online learning support platform available. This number varied significantly between disadvantaged and advantaged schools, with only just over 40% of disadvantaged schools agreeing, compared to over 70% of more advantaged schools.

The Government has attempted to address some of these challenges. At the daily Number 10 press briefing on 19 April, the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, announced

that vulnerable and disadvantaged young people would receive laptops and tablets “to make remote education accessible for pupils staying at home during the coronavirus outbreak.” The Government also announced that it would provide 4G routers where disadvantaged pupils and care leavers do not have internet in the household. Concerns have however been raised that these schemes will not be in place in time to make a difference this academic year, with the majority of free laptops not being delivered until June.

The Government has actively promoted two online learning platforms, Oak National Academy and BBC Bitesize, as well as numerous other resources for pupils and parents online. The Oak National Academy is an ‘online classroom’ created by teachers and includes lessons for pupils from reception through to year 10. However, the Government has not actively promoted learning based on the national curriculum, instead leaving this for schools to continue leading.

Whilst some year groups may return to school over the next couple of months, it will be important for many pupils to continue home learning for the foreseeable future. What can the Government learn from other countries?

1. Ensure that no child is left behind. The Dutch Government has set-up a fund to ensure that all pupils, particularly those from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, have the resources to continue to learn.

2. Learning materials need to be readily available on paper and online in parallel. Schools in Estonia were well prepared for the unexpected pandemic, with all learning materials now available online and on paper. Many schools had already been using digital versions of resources and did not need additional support or guidance.

3. Establish partnerships with local communities, local authorities, and other sectors across government and the private sector in order to support the delivery of education. In Portugal, a network of partner institutions helps to ensure contact with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In Latvia, mobile network operators, ICT associations and municipalities work together to provide access to online learning for all students.

4. The Government should lead on providing online learning environments to ensure that all pupils are able to follow the national curriculum. In Japan, the Ministry of Education has set-up an e-learning portal, which provides free learning materials which can be used at home.

5. Use an online portal to ensure that all teachers can interact with their pupils. In France, National Centre for Distance Education (CNED) created a free pedagogical platform which gives teachers a possibility to hold virtual classes to assure students have contact with their peers and teachers

This pandemic has been a steep learning curve for every country and government across the world. It is vital that children and young people are able to continue to learn during this challenging time in order to ensure that they do not become a disadvantaged generation in years to come. The more that the Government can do now to support pupils, teachers and parents, the better outcomes will be when the pandemic is over.

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Select Committee Reports

The following reports are reviewed in this section, and follow on from the last issue of *Education Journal Review:*

Value for Money in Higher Education, House of Commons Education Select Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19. Published on 5 November 2018.

Evidence-based Early Years Intervention, House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2017-19. HC 506. Published on 14 November 2018.

Delivering Global Britain: FCO Skills, House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 14th Report of Session 2017-19. HC 1254, published on 28 November 2018.

Nursing Degree Apprenticeships: In poor health? House of Commons Education Select Committee, 8th Report of Session 2017–19. HC 1017 Published on 6 December 2018.

Mental Health Services for Children and Young People, House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 72nd report of Session 2017–19. HC 1593. Published 11 January 2019.

Academy Accounts and Performance, House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 73rd Report of Session 2017–19. HC 1597. Published on 23 January 2019.

Tackling Disadvantage in the Early Years, House of Commons Education Select Committee, 9th Report of Session 2017–19. HC 1006. Published on 7 February 2019.

Brexit: The Erasmus and Horizon Programmes, House of Lords European Union Committee, 28th report of Session 2017-19, HL Paper 283, Published on 12 February 2019.

Closing the Regional Attainment Gap, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 20 February 2019. This is not a select committee report but is included because of its interest.

Value for Money in HE

Value for Money in Higher Education, House of Commons Education Select Committee, 7th Report of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. HC 343. Published on 5 November 2018 by the Stationery Office Ltd.

The report, Value for Money in Higher Education, by the House of Commons Education Select Committee, called for the post-18 education and funding review to be brave in its approach, to design a holistic funding model which would support a wider range of pathways and prioritise support for disadvantaged students.

The Committee urged the Government to take the opportunity to signal a move away from the traditional linear approach which currently dominated and ensure that the future of higher education would be more inclusive, more skills-based and more focused on value for money for students. The Committee recommended that every higher education institution should publish a breakdown of how tuition fees were spent on their websites, by the end of 2018, and it recommended that the Office for Students should intervene if the deadline was not met.

The report pointed out that unjustifiably high pay for senior management in higher education had become the norm rather than the exception and it did not represent value for money for students or the taxpayer. The Committee called for the Office for Students to publish "strict criteria" for universities on acceptable levels of pay that could be linked to average staff pay, performance and other measures that the Office for Students saw fit. The Committee recommended that institutions should routinely publish the total remuneration packages of their Vice-Chancellors in a visible place on their website. The Committee also argued that vice-Chancellors should never sit on their remuneration boards, which should be enforced by the Office for Students.

The report pointed out that the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework was still in its infancy and it would require further improvement and embedding to become the broad measure of quality that it would need to be. The Committee recommended that the independent review of TEF

should focus on how the exercise was used by students to inform and improve choice. The Committee stressed that the review must include an assessment of how TEF was used in post-16 careers advice because for the TEF to improve value for money for students it would need to play a more significant role in the decision-making process of applicants.

The report called on institutions to move away from a linear approach to degrees, and enable more part-time, mature and disadvantaged students to study in higher education. The Committee recommended that the Government's current post-18 review should develop a funding model which would allow a range of flexible options including credit transfer and "hopping on and off" learning. The report argued that more flexible approaches to higher education should be supplemented by the option for undergraduates of studying for two-year accelerated degrees alongside the traditional three-year model. The Committee recommended that the post-18 review should investigate potential funding models to clarify the benefits and costs of accelerated degrees, taking into account fees, living costs and post-study earnings.

However, the Committee stressed that the introduction of two-year degrees must not create a two-tier system where students from disadvantaged backgrounds were encouraged to take them on the basis of cost, and it recommended that the Government's review of higher education should include an impact assessment of how accelerated degrees would affect disadvantaged students.

The Committee said that it had been "extremely disappointed" by the response from the Institute for Apprenticeships to widespread concerns from the higher education sector on the future of degree apprenticeships, and it urged the Institute to make the growth of degree apprenticeships a strategic priority.

The Committee argued that degree qualifications must be retained in apprenticeship standards, and the Institute must remove the bureaucratic hurdles which universities were facing. The report added that the Institute and the Education and Skills Funding Agency would need to engage much more actively with the higher education sector and take better account of their expertise.

The Committee stressed that degree apprenticeships were crucial to boosting the productivity of the country, as they provided another legitimate route to higher education

qualifications and brought more students from disadvantaged backgrounds into higher education. The report argued that some of the money which was currently allocated by the Office for Students for widening access could be better spent on the development and promotion of degree apprenticeships and support for degree apprentices to climb the ladder of opportunity.

Degree apprenticeships

The Committee insisted that all higher education institutions should offer degree apprenticeships, and it encouraged students from all backgrounds to undertake them. The report recommended that the Office for Students should demonstrate its support for them by allocating a significant portion of its widening access funding to the expansion of degree apprenticeships specifically for disadvantaged students.

The report pointed out that the implementation of T-Level qualifications from 2020 could offer improved access to university for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and it called on the Government to engage with universities and UCAS to determine an appropriate tariff weighting prior to the introduction of T-levels. The report also encouraged universities to continue to accept BTECs and introduce additional academic and pastoral support to the students throughout their studies.

The Committee recommend that universities should consider including significant periods of work experience within undergraduate degree courses, which could be a year in industry, or shorter placements with local employers. It added that there should also be a greater focus on the extent to which universities prepared their students for work in the TEF criteria.

The report argued that as higher education institutions spent a vast amount of public money on access and participation, there must be transparency on what they were investing in, a greater focus on outcomes for students and a rigorous evaluation process. In response to the Director of Fair Access's new proposals the Committee said it expected to see institutions focusing their efforts on value for money for the most disadvantaged students and facing penalties if sufficient progress was not made.

The Committee recommended a move away from the simple use of entry tariffs as a league table measure towards contextual admissions, foundation courses and other routes to entry and it urged the Office for Students to "clamp down" on

the rise in unconditional offers.

The report argued that the gap in entry rates between the most and least disadvantaged students was still too wide when it should be closing fast. While the Committee supported the use of contextualised admissions to bring more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds into higher education, it recognised that the practice should not be used in isolation, and that more effective outreach should be followed by support for disadvantaged students throughout their degree.

The Committee recommended that institutions should state their contextualisation policies in their application information so that disadvantaged students and schools in areas with lower rates of participation in higher education would have a better understanding of the entry requirements to different institutions.

The Committee stressed that it was "deeply concerned" by the fall in both part-time and mature learners, and the impact that it had on those from lower socio-economic groups going into higher education. The report pointed out that although the number of disadvantaged school leavers going into higher education had increased, the total number of English undergraduate entrants from low participation areas had decreased by 15% between 2011/12 and 2015/16.

The Committee recommended that the decline in part-time and mature learners should be a major focus of the Government's post-18 education and funding review and it supported calls for the review to redesign the funding system for such learners.

Based on the overwhelming evidence the Committee had heard during the inquiry, it recommended that the Government should return to the pre-2016 system and reinstate the means-tested system of loans and maintenance grants.

The report warned that the reforms that had been introduced by successive governments to higher education had caused a growing tension between the perceived value of study to a student, the funding and the wider economic value of higher education. The Committee believed that the situation had been caused in part by the way that the system had changed incrementally and was widely misunderstood. The report concluded that the current system of tuition fees and repayments was more akin to a graduate tax and therefore promoting better public understanding should form part of the HE funding review.

Early Years Intervention

Evidence-based Early Years Intervention, House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, HC 506. Published on 14 November 2018 by the Stationery Office Ltd.

The report by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee pointed out that research into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) had demonstrated a correlation between adversity suffered during childhood and an increased prevalence of health and social problems in later life.

Despite a variety of proposed explanations for the correlation, the causal pathways linking childhood adversity or trauma to subsequent problems were less certain. However, when delivered effectively, there was strong evidence that early intervention could dramatically improve people's lives and reduce long-term costs to the Government.

The Committee called for a particular focus on developing interventions to address adverse childhood experiences for which no effective intervention had been demonstrated, including sexual abuse, parental substance misuse or parental incarceration and crime. It also recommended that the Government should ensure that academic researchers could access Government administrative data relevant to childhood adversity, long-term outcomes and the impact of early intervention.

The report pointed out that whilst there was evidence of good practice in some local authority areas in England, there is no overarching national strategy from the UK Government targeting childhood adversity and early intervention as an effective approach to address it. The Committee argued that there was also a lack of effective oversight mechanisms for the Government or others to monitor what local authorities were doing, which had led to a "fragmented and highly variable" approach to early intervention across England.

The report stressed that there was "a pressing need for a fundamental shift in the Government's approach to early intervention targeting childhood adversity and trauma". It called

on the Government to match the ambition of the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and build on the example set by some English councils, to make early intervention and childhood adversity a priority and set out a new national strategy by the end of the Parliamentary session to empower and encourage local authorities to deliver effective, sustainable, evidence-based early intervention.

The Committee urged the Government to ensure that it had better oversight of the provision of early intervention around the country, so that it could identify approaches that were working well, detect local authorities in need of support and hold local authorities to account. The report recommended that the Government should determine what information would be needed to be able to assess the local provision of early intervention and set out a framework as part of the new national strategy to ensure that all local authorities provided such information, with as little disruption to their working practice as possible.

The Committee pointed out that co-ordination between the different Government departments whose areas of responsibility related to childhood adversity could be improved and it welcome the formation of the new ministerial group working to improve family support for those with young children. The report recommended that the group should: make tackling childhood adversity a focus of its work; improve cross-Government coordination on the issue; and ensure that there was accountability for driving the agenda across all Government departments.

Family Nurse Partnership

The Committee urged that Government to review the current provision of the Healthy Child Programme across England and set out, as part of the new national strategy, a date for achieving complete coverage in the number of children who received all five mandated health visits. The report pointed out that there had been “significant concern” within the early years community about the outcomes for assessment that had been chosen by the then Department of Health for the major study it had commissioned of the Family Nurse Partnership. The Committee therefore did not encourage national or local Government to act upon the study’s overall recommendation to discontinue provision of the Family Nurse Partnership. However, the Committee pointed out that where the study’s

findings could be used to improve the impact of the Family Nurse Partnership programme such action should be pursued.

The Committee commended the Family Nurse Partnership National Unit for implementing its ADAPT initiative to learn from the study's findings, and it urged local commissioners and providers to act upon the conclusions reached by the initiative. The report pointed out that while the Government's willingness to commission a significant study of the effectiveness of the Family Nurse Partnership had been commendable, it warned that such studies would only be of value if their findings were widely supported and acted upon.

The report concluded that the delay in launching a consultation on the future of Sure Start Centres was regrettable and it had meant that Ofsted had not inspected children's centres since 2015. The Committee recommended that the Government should clarify its position on Sure Start centres and hold any planned consultation within three months. The report stressed that if a consultation was not going to be held, the Government must urgently reinstate Ofsted inspections of children's centres and state the role and value of children's centres.

The report pointed out that there had been "a disappointing level of ambition and focus on pre-school aged children" in the Government's 2017 Green Paper on transforming children and young people's mental health provision. Therefore, the Committee recommended that as it develops its action on children and young people's mental health, the Government should recognise the importance of child development and the impact of adversity in the early years, and ensure that it adopted "transformative" ambitions and policies for pre-school aged children alongside its work on targeting schools and colleges.

The Committee recommended that the Government should set a policy for primary and secondary schools to promote wellbeing as well as improving the early identification of, and support for, emerging problems. It also called on the Government to develop a new national strategy that would specifically focus on childhood adversity and trauma, and on evidence-based early intervention initiatives that could address the issues.

The report argued that there was an opportunity for the Government to increase the provision of evidence-based early years programmes, without increased cost, by setting more

prescriptive specifications on the content of childcare eligible for Government funding. The Committee suggested that the Government should work with researchers and practitioners to examine how new specifications on the free childcare it funded could increase the use of evidence-based programmes, and what the impact would be on the families affected.

The report pointed out that despite the long-term savings associated with effective early intervention, the amount of funding available to local authorities that had been nominally destined for early intervention had been declining. The Committee warned that such a situation could result in early intervention activity being sacrificed in favour of statutory duties, in addition to the commissioning of cheaper, unproven interventions as well as a reluctance to properly evaluate interventions that were being delivered.

The Committee stressed that nevertheless, funding constraints should not be used by local commissioners and others as an excuse to avoid acting upon the latest evidence regarding childhood adversity and early intervention, especially given the savings that some programmes could deliver for local authorities, particularly in the long-term. The Committee had been concerned that the local collection and analysis of data was not conducted as widely or as thoroughly as it should be and the collation of relevant data at a national level was also insufficient, as fewer than half of local authorities submitted data on the five mandated visits of the Healthy Child Programme to NHS Digital.

Public health indicator

The report noted that Public Health England's public health indicator data did not appear to include any measures sufficiently focused on childhood adversity or early intervention. It added that two years on from the publication of the Government's "vision" for children's social care, there was still significant work to be done to achieve its aim of making full use of data in the early years system.

The report pointed out that the establishment of Social Work England had provided an opportunity to review the training given to children's social workers and it recommended that the Government should ensure that the accreditation criteria for social workers included knowledge of child development science, the impact of adversity and methods for addressing that, as well as good practice in collecting and using

data.

The Committee recommended that the Government's new strategy for adversity-targeted early intervention should include plans to improve the use of data for assessing early intervention and identifying families which could benefit from early intervention, at local and national level. The Committee added that the new strategy should set out what local authorities should measure to assess their early intervention initiatives or to identify families which could benefit from receiving early intervention support, and give examples of specific data that would capture that.

The report stressed that the measures should be identified in consultation with child development experts and local authorities and cover aspects such as social, emotional and language development from birth through to the start of school. The report added that the new strategy should include guidance to local authorities and their partners on data protection legislation and provide examples of best practice in data sharing, focusing specifically on childhood development, trauma and related early interventions.

The Committee also suggested that the Government should additionally consider what infrastructure and licences could facilitate efficient, interoperable data processing by local authorities and assess the cost-benefit of providing funding. The report pointed out that the Government should review the pre-qualification training and continuing professional development offered to the different professions in the early intervention workforce and ensure that each covered the different elements at a level appropriate to the profession in question.

A new national strategy

As part of a new national strategy for adversity-targeted early intervention, the Committee recommended that the Government should state that in commissioning evidence-based programmes, local authorities should ensure that there was sufficient accredited, ongoing, specialist supervision from qualified supervisors in the programme for the workforce, throughout the delivery of the programme. The report added that local commissioners should aim to support the development of their own accredited supervisors, to enable cost-savings and the delivery of an experienced and expert workforce.

The report pointed out that the Apprenticeship Levy offered a potential source of new funding for training of the early years workforce and the new adversity-targeted national strategy should promote the opportunity presented by the Apprenticeship Levy as a source of funding for training early years practitioners.

The Committee recommended that the Government should monitor the number of local authorities that made use of the Levy in such a way, evaluate the impact where authorities had used it, and provide guidance to assist other local authorities in using the Levy funding if it proved to be successful.

The report argued that as the What Works Centre had been established to review the evidence relating to early intervention and to help disseminate the latest findings to relevant stakeholders, the Early Intervention Foundation also had a key role to play in improving the provision of evidence-based early intervention in England, and it should be a key partner to the Government in developing and implementing the new national strategy.

The Committee recommended that as part of the forthcoming Spending Review, the Government should review funding for the Early Intervention Foundation with a view to increasing and extending it. The report suggested that to help them to deliver on the new adversity-targeted early intervention strategy, local authorities would benefit from the support of a central specialist team with experience in effectively and sustainably implementing early intervention programmes, to help with planning and delivering evidence-based early intervention and to overcome the various challenges. The Committee suggested that an expanded Early Intervention Foundation would be well-placed to host such a team, and it urged the Government to invest in the Foundation.

The Committee suggested that while the Early Intervention Foundation should identify local authorities that were willing to become Early Intervention Places, which would receive particular support from the central, specialist team, local authorities should utilise implementation science to build sustainable implementations of evidence-based programmes, which would simultaneously generate new knowledge that could be rolled out to other local authorities at a pace consistent with the development of sustainable service transformation.

Delivering Global Britain: FCO Skills

Delivering Global Britain: FCO Skills, House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 14th Report of Session 2017/19, report and minutes relating to the report, HC 1254, published on 28 November 2018.

This report is about the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), which the Committee thinks there is a lack of clarity over, and the rather confused meaning of Global Britain that the FCO is meant to have a central role in delivering. It looks at the skills that the FCO needs and has, including the provision of modern foreign language skills. In this review of the report we focus on those aspects of the report that deal with skills and education.

The report stated that while the FCO needs to ensure it has the skills required to deliver Global Britain, it thought it "probable that the Diplomatic Academy will miss the target it has set for training experts from across government in trade policy and negotiations. We also continue to believe that the FCO faces a considerable challenge to ensure it has the skills it will need for European diplomacy after Brexit, both with the EU and bilaterally with member states. We call on the FCO to clarify its plans in both these crucial areas".

The Committee noted that the Diplomatic Academy, which the FCO had established as a training facility in February 2015, had set a target for training 240 cross-government staff to expert level in trade policy and negotiations by March 2019. The Committee thought that this was "a challenging one, and based on progress so far, it seems probable that the target will not be met in time". The Committee called for the Government to advise it on whether the target would be met, and if not, what would fill the gap.

The Committee had previously published a report on the FCO and Global Britain. It still felt that there was a lack of clarity about what this concept meant. Continued reference to the concept of Global Britain without a clear sense of what Global Britain is, and why the FCO is uniquely placed to deliver it, is likely to exacerbate the risks associated with setting the

priorities for skills development. The Committee also believed that "the fragmentation of government responsibilities relating to international affairs compounds the problem". (This was a reference to the creation of the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Department for International Trade.)

The FCO's Priority Skills Statement and Skills Framework were praised by the Committee as "good first steps towards developing a system that helps ensure the FCO has the full range of skills it needs for modern diplomacy." However, the Committee thought that "a list of 20 or more separate skills is not a clear guide to where the FCO should concentrate its limited resources." The Committee believed that "in order for the FCO's effort in defining priority skills to be truly meaningful, the FCO must have an accurate and systematic understanding of the skills its staff hold and the areas where there are shortcomings." The Committee recommended that a skills audit be carried out as soon as possible once the Atlas Enterprise Resource Planning system is introduced, and by no later than the end of 2019. "This audit should be used to identify those priority skills in which it is judged the FCO particularly lacks capacity, and where resources should be concentrated."

The Committee welcomed the efforts the FCO has made to emphasise skills in performance measurement and promotion. However, it felt that the FCO "does not yet appear to have the ability to track accurately the progress that its staff are making against the targets set out for skills development, which increases the risk that priorities will be established but not enforced." The Committee also thought that the FCO had yet to define "what an expert looks like in the majority of its priority skills". The Committee recommended that the FCO measure the proportion of its staff reaching the expected attainment in Foundation and Practitioner-level skills as soon as is practical once the Atlas system is in place, and that it set out a plan for ensuring that staff not yet at the expected level reach it promptly. "We call on the FCO to set a specific time scale for this work, and to commit to reporting the figures to us once they are available. The FCO should also produce a definition of expert-level attainment in core diplomatic skills, and should add this to the criteria used by the Senior Appointments Board."

The Committee noted the obvious importance of foreign languages. "Failure to excel in foreign languages undermines whatever other skills our diplomats may develop." The

Committee welcomed the improvement made that the FCO's language skills in the past few years, "but there is still a long way to go, and even the FCO's existing targets for language attainment will be challenging to reach".

The Committee was encouraged by the FCO's relatively high attainment in Mandarin, but was also concerned by the lower figures for Russian and Arabic. "The FCO cannot allow under-resourcing to mean that operational demands result in officers being sent on postings before they have met the required language proficiency. The FCO's goal of having 80% of officers in speaker slots at their target-level language attainment (TLA) by 2020, while a significant improvement over past performance, is still conservative in absolute terms. Yet, based on the current track record, even this goal will be challenging to reach. The Foreign Secretary's commitment to double the number of FCO language speakers and increase the number of languages taught is laudable, but it is clear to us that this will require considerable additional resources, and sustained, senior-level attention to achieve."

The challenge to the UK from Russia and the geopolitical role of China were growing in importance. Developing and maintaining expertise on both countries and their languages would need to be a key focus for the FCO.

Nursing Degree Apprenticeships

Nursing Degree Apprenticeships: In poor health? House of Commons Education Select Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. HC 1017 Published on 6 December 2018 by the Stationery Office Ltd.

In its report, Nursing Degree Apprenticeships: In poor health? the House of Commons Education Committee stressed that setting an ambitious target for apprenticeships across the public sector would be vital to promoting their uptake as part of a wholesale shift in the economy. But it warned that the target would need to be realistic, and any barriers would need to be torn down.

The report added that currently, there were too many obstacles in the way of nursing degree apprenticeships, which made it extremely difficult for the NHS to play its part in achieving the public sector target. The Committee urged the Government to maintain an ongoing conversation with the NHS to ensure that it was supported to develop a sufficient number of quality nursing apprenticeships.

While the Committee recognised that nursing degree apprenticeships alone would not solve the nursing workforce crisis or improve access to nursing for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, it argued that no-one should be prevented from undertaking a nursing degree apprenticeship due to a lack of availability or take-up within the system. The Committee welcomed the Government's cross-departmental work in establishing nursing degree apprenticeships and it looked forward to it developing with a focus on expanding the programme to ensure that every future nurse would have a choice about their route into the profession.

The report pointed out that there was currently little incentive for the NHS to spend precious time and resource building nursing apprenticeships and it was therefore imperative that nursing apprenticeships should be able to work for the NHS as well as for providers and nursing students. The Committee said that it would look forward to the outcome of the Nursing and Midwifery Council's consultation on whether nursing associate students should remain supernumerary and whether there were alternative approaches. It also urged the NMC to

apply any safe and effective flexibility to supernumerary status to nursing degree apprentices in addition to nursing associates. The Committee recommended that the Government should reconsider its position in not providing much needed flexibility in the apprenticeship levy for the NHS and it urged the Government to allow NHS employers to use their apprenticeship levy to cover the backfill costs of apprentices who were required by the NMC to be supernumerary for over 20% of their contracted hours.

The Committee pointed out that in its report on the quality of apprenticeship training and provision, it had recommended that the Government should double the time employers had to spend their levy funds to 48 months and it reiterated that recommendation, which would allow the NHS to develop and implement more apprenticeship standards. The Committee also recommended that the funding band for nursing degree apprenticeships should remain at a minimum of £27,000 and that the IfA should consider increasing it.

The report argued that any future reduction of the funding band must be assessed to ensure that providers could continue to deliver apprenticeships. The Committee recommended that the Government should prioritise investment in CPD for nurses and that it should release a strategy and timeline for how it intended to do so. It also recommended that more postgraduate (Level 7) apprenticeships should be created for nurses to enable them to further their careers and develop specialisms. It added that the Government should provide funding for trailblazer groups to develop such apprenticeships.

The Committee recommend that employers should be able to use the apprenticeship levy to develop the necessary infrastructure for nursing degree apprenticeships, including training nurses in supervision and protecting time for them to undertake such training.

Mental Health

Mental Health Services for Children and Young People, House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 72nd report of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. HC 1593. Published 11 January 2019 by the Stationery Office Limited.

The report by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts noted that one in eight five to 19-year-olds were thought to have a diagnosable mental health condition. According to a recent NHS survey, the number of five to 15-year-olds with a mental disorder had increased over time: rising from 9.7% in 1999 and 10.1% in 2004 to 11.2% in 2017.

The Committee concluded that most young people with a mental health condition did not receive the treatment they needed, and it warned that under current NHS plans that would remain the case "for years to come", while many would continue to face "unacceptably long waits for treatment".

The report pointed out that while the NHS's Five Year Forward View for Mental Health aimed to increase the proportion of children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition who accessed NHS-funded treatment from an estimated baseline of 25% to 35% by 2020–21, it would still leave two-thirds of young people in need without NHS treatment. The report added that similarly, the Green Paper plans to introduce new mental health support in schools would only cover up to a quarter of the country by 2022–23.

The NHS had estimated that just 30.5% of children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition had accessed NHS-funded treatment in 2017–18, and the Committee heard numerous examples of families being unable to access the treatment they needed or they had been forced to wait too long for treatment.

The Committee argued that although preventing and intervening early in mental health conditions was thought to reduce the need for more specialist services and reduce future costs, children and young people were being turned away from NHS services because their condition had not been considered to be severe enough to warrant access to overstretched services. The Committee recommended that from April 2019 to

April 2022, the Department and NHS England should provide annual updates to the Committee on the number of young people:

- Who had requested or had been referred for treatment (i.e. number of young people who had requested a CAMHS appointment).
- Whose requested referrals had been accepted and had subsequently received treatment, and how long they had had to wait.
- With a diagnosable condition who had received NHS-funded mental health services.

The Committee also asked for annual updates on waiting times across the range of children and young people's mental health services and progress in implementing and evaluating the pilot schemes for the Mental Health Support Teams in schools, the first of which should include current understanding of the financial and human cost, and longer-term impacts, of providing no, or delayed, treatment for children and young people, and the steps being taken by the Department and NHS England to address those impacts.

The report stressed that getting the right workforce in place was the biggest barrier to the Government's ambitions for children and young people's mental health services and it cited NHS England which had warned that the workforce was the single biggest risk to achieving its Forward View ambitions.

The Committee found that Health Education England had limited information to develop its mental health workforce plan, which included an ambition to increase the children and young people's mental health workforce of around 11,300 by a further 4,500 staff. The report noted that HEE still had no data specifically for the children and young people's mental health workforce to measure progress against expansion plans. It added that available data on the overall mental health workforce had suggested little change in numbers since Future in Mind had been published in March 2015, as there had been just a 1% increase overall between April 2015 and September 2017.

The report pointed out that given the length of training times (a minimum of three to four years), Health Education England's short-term focus had been on retaining current staff and re-recruiting staff who had left the NHS. It had estimated that, if the retention of nurses had remained at the 2012 level,

50% of current nursing vacancies would not exist. In addition to increasing numbers, there were challenges in increasing the skill set of the existing workforce, as the Royal College of Nursing had said that the removal of continuing professional development for nurses had made it more difficult to provide them with mental health training.

As part of the annual update, the Committee recommended that the Department, NHS England and Health Education England should report on its progress in expanding the children and young people's mental health workforce and set out any changes they may have made to plans or targets and knock-on effects to other parts of the Five Year Forward View.

The Committee warned that while the Government was committed to delivering the cross-departmental vision set out in Future in Mind, it had not set out the actions and budget required to deliver it in full, or any measurable objectives or targets. It pointed out that in practice a number of separate work programmes, largely NHS-led, had been implementing parts of Future in Mind, but there were no cross-departmental accountability arrangements in place for delivering it, or for children and young people's mental health support more generally.

The report noted that the Department did not intend to revisit Future in Mind when planning future improvements for children and young people's mental health services, although NHS England had been developing a ten-year plan which was expected to prioritise mental health services for children and young people. Instead of creating a corresponding cross-departmental plan, the Department said it would take a similar approach to its joint working on the Green Paper with the Department for Education, by working on a one-to-one basis with at least five departments. However, the Committee warned that it was not known how certain cross-departmental issues, for example housing for mental health staff, would be addressed.

The Committee recommended that by April 2019, the Department should take the lead on co-ordinating a comprehensive, practical and long-term cross-departmental plan which would set out how the Government would achieve the improvements to children and young people's services and support, as envisaged in Future in Mind. The Committee added that while it would not need to be delivered as a single

programme of work, it should set out what each department was responsible for and be specific enough to hold the contributing departments to account for the delivery of the plan.

The report pointed out that action to improve prevention and early intervention had been slower than work to improve NHS treatment and many areas of government that provided preventative or early intervention services, such as schools and local government, had reduced non-statutory support following significant funding challenges. The Committee found that there was limited information about what support was available outside the health sector or understanding about the impact of cuts to such support on the demand for NHS services. It added that a further challenge to implementing prevention and early intervention initiatives was the limited knowledge about which approaches were most effective. The report pointed out that although the Green Paper aimed to improve prevention and early intervention, as it would only be rolled out from 2019, it would be too late to make a significant difference to the current programme to improve NHS services.

The Committee recommended that as part of its cross-government planning, the Government, led by the Department, should prioritise specific improvements in prevention and early intervention, including, and in addition to, the work that was currently being undertaken on the outcomes of the Green Paper, taking an evidence-based approach. The Committee added that changes should also be monitored in other departmental policies (for example, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions) to anticipate their impact on children's mental health.

The report noted that while the NHS had committed to achieving "parity of esteem" between mental and physical health services, it had not defined what the practical, meaningful outcomes were in terms of access to services, waiting times, or patient outcomes. For example, it had not yet determined what percentage of young people in need would access mental health services under full "parity".

The report pointed out that so far, the Department and NHS England had taken a pragmatic approach to identify what they expected to achieve with available funding, rather than considering what improvements would be required to support all children and young people in need of mental health support. New estimates, published in November 2018, had shown that

the number of children and young people (five to 15-year-olds) with a mental health condition had increased from 10.1% in 2004 to 11.2% in 2017, which would impact how long it would take and cost to achieve full "parity of esteem" between physical and mental health.

The Committee recommended that in or alongside its ten-year plan, the NHS should set out what it wanted to achieve for children and young people's mental health services, including defining what "parity of esteem" would mean in practice, the criteria it would use to measure progress and what data/information it would require.

The Committee also recommended that by April 2019, the NHS should set out to the Committee what arrangements were in place to collect the data it would need to:

- Set up a robust baseline, and monitor progress on children and young people's mental health services in the ten-year plan for the NHS.
- Reliably measure patient outcomes.
- Fully evaluate approaches in the Green Paper pilot areas to inform the national roll-out of services, including information from outside the NHS.

Academy Accounts

Academy Accounts and Performance, House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, Seventy-Third Report of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. HC 1597. Published on 23 January 2019 by the Station Office Limited.

The report by the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts argued that academy trusts did not make enough information available to help parents and local communities understand what was happening in individual academy schools and some parents had resorted to using freedom of information requests to find out what was happening at their school.

The Committee pointed out that the accounts information available through Companies House was high-level, it covered each academy trust as a whole and it was of little use to parents and local communities. The Department requires academy trusts to have a scheme of delegation to set out which decisions were made at school level and which at trust level, and they were also required to have parent representatives on their governing bodies. However, the Committee had heard that Bright Tribe Trust had removed local governance and created a regional governing body for all its schools in the north of England.

The Committee therefore recommended that the Education and Skills Funding Agency should include in the Academies Financial Handbook 2019 requirements for academy trusts to make financial information available at school level and be transparent about governance and decision-making at all levels of the trust.

Because the Committee had concluded that the Department had not been adequately meeting the needs of users in presenting financial information about academy trusts, in March 2018, it had recommended that the Department should publish more analysis in the academy sector annual report and accounts, including a comparison of the financial performance of academy trusts of different sizes and geographical areas. While the Department had included some additional analysis in the latest annual report, it had not included the breakdowns that had been requested. The

Committee also suggested that it would be more transparent and helpful for the user if the Department were to present separate information on certain types of academies, such as university technical colleges.

The report noted that the Department had presented analysis in the annual report and accounts on academy trusts' cumulative deficits which had drawn attention to how many trusts had been in significant financial distress. The Committee recommended that the Department should do more to explain the financial sustainability of the academies sector as a whole, for example by presenting analysis of trends in in-year deficits to explain whether and why a growing number of trusts had been spending more than their annual income.

The Department had claimed to have acted in a "user-centred way" in terms of giving parents, councillors and schools performance and financial information for their school to enable them to compare it with others. But the Committee argued that the accounts themselves would better support transparency and accountability if they included more detailed analysis.

The Committee recommended that the Department should:

- Write to the Committee by March 2019 setting out the work it had done to understand who the users of the academy sector annual report and accounts were and what information they needed.
- The annual report for the academy schools sector for 2017/18 should include an analysis of the financial performance of academy trusts of different sizes and geographical locations, and an analysis of trends in trusts' in-year deficits as well as cumulative deficits.

The report stressed that it was not clear to whom parents could turn when they needed to escalate concerns about the running of academy schools and academy trusts. The Department required academy trusts to have complaints procedures to deal with concerns that had not been addressed, and there was a right of appeal to the Department. However, the Committee pointed out that the Department could not confirm that appropriate arrangements for complaints were in place in all academy trusts and it had acknowledged that, in the case of Bright Tribe, they had not applied.

While Bright Tribe had had a complaints policy for Whitehaven school, there had been no process for complaining

about problems with the multi-academy trust, and frequent changes of staff at the trust and school made it difficult for parents to know who to speak to. The report concluded that parents whose children were in stand-alone schools were more likely to feel that their views were heard than those in multi-academy trusts.
The Committee recommended that:
• By the start of the 2018/19 school year, the Department should ensure that all academy trusts had published complaints procedures, including a named individual for parents to escalate concerns to.
• By March 2019, the Department should make the name and contact details clear as to whom in the Department parents should turn to if their concerns were not being addressed adequately by the academy trust.

The report warned that where there had been serious failings at academy trusts the Department had not had an effective regime to sanction the academy trustees and leaders who had been responsible. The Committee pointed out that despite a "catastrophic failure of governance", the previous executive headteacher at Durand Academy Trust had apparently been entitled to a lump sum payment which, even after a statutory inquiry by the Charity Commission, had totalled £850,000.

The Committee argued that the "shocking reward for failure" had been the result of having few sanctions to penalise those involved in malpractice. The report pointed out that while the department could ban individuals from teaching, as it had in the case of the former headteacher at Perry Beeches Academy Trust and it could also stop individuals from being school governors, but the ESFA had admitted that there was nothing to stop people involved in malpractice from acting as trustees or governors elsewhere, for example at a further education college, or from setting up businesses that could trade with the education and training providers that it oversaw and regulated. The report noted that the ESFA and the Charity Commission were investigating whether individuals involved in malpractice could be disqualified from becoming company directors.

The Committee recommended that the Department should write to it by March 2019 to set out what sanctions it had imposed to date, and explain how it planned to strengthen the sanctions regime to deter, punish and prevent malpractice. The Committee added that in strengthening the sanctions regime,

the Department should work with the Charity Commission, Companies House and the Insolvency Service.

Insufficiently transparent

The report stressed that the ESFA had not been sufficiently transparent about the results of inquiries into concerns about the financial management and governance of academy trusts. It added that while the ESFA regularly conducted investigations and reviews into academy trusts' financial management and governance, the results of the inquiries were not always made public and, where they were published, there could be lengthy delays, as the Department had taken two years to publish the results of its inquiries into concerns about Wakefield City Academies Trust. Although the interim Chief Executive of Bright Tribe had told the Committee that the ongoing investigations into the trust would be concluded by Christmas 2018 after which the trust or the ESFA would then take any necessary action, the Committee argued that it had been given no assurances that the reports and the actions would be made public in a timely way.

The Committee therefore recommended that:

- The ESFA should publish the results of its inquiries into concerns about the financial management and governance of academy trusts within two months of completing the work.
- On Bright Tribe specifically, the ESFA should write to the Committee by March 2019 with the results of the investigations that the ESFA and the trust had been undertaking when evidence had been taken.

The Committee found that neither Ofsted nor the Education and Skills Funding Agency had assessed the impact of funding pressures on the quality of education and the outcomes that schools achieved. The report noted that the Department had told the Committee in early 2017 that it would gain assurance, in part from Ofsted inspections, that schools were achieving "desirable" efficiency savings, and that educational outcomes were not being adversely affected by the need to make savings. However, Ofsted had not provided the assurance. In June 2018, HM Chief Inspector had told the Committee that the responsibility for school funding lay with other parts of government and therefore the Committee had not been provided with clear and direct answers about the impact of funding pressures.

In her subsequent letter in October 2018, HM Chief Inspector had said that, as funding growth had slowed, school leaders had been forced to make difficult choices and work harder to balance their budgets; however, she had reported that inspectors had not been seeing an impact on education standards. Amanda Spielman had noted, however, that the current inspection framework had not been designed to capture the effects of curriculum narrowing. The Committee concluded that while it understood that Ofsted and the ESFA had started to seek to join up their work, the Department still did not understand the impact of funding pressures. The Committee recommended that as part of its school inspections, Ofsted should examine and report on whether the quality of education and the outcomes that schools achieved were being adversely affected by the need to make savings.

Asbestos

The report noted that nearly a quarter of schools had still not provided the information that the Department would need to understand fully the extent of asbestos in school buildings and how the risks were being managed. The Committee stressed that it remained "seriously concerned about the Department's lack of information and assurance about asbestos in school buildings" as it had first reported in April 2017. The report noted that the Department had launched its "asbestos management assurance" process on 1 March 2018 to collect data on how asbestos in schools was being managed, and to provide assurance that academy trusts and local authorities were complying with their legal duties.

The Department had asked schools to respond by 31 May 2018, which due to the poor response rate, had been extended the deadline to 25 June 2018 before being extended again to 27 July 2018. However, only 77% of schools had responded and the Department had extended the deadline yet again, to 15 February 2019, to allow the remaining 23% of schools to respond.

While the Department had said that those schools that had not responded would be picked up in its school condition survey, the Committee remained unconvinced that extending the survey deadline again would result in a much higher response rate, or that the condition survey would provide the level of specific assurance that was needed about how asbestos was being managed. The Committee therefore

recommended that in March 2019, the Department should "name and shame" those schools which had failed to meet the February 2019 deadline.

Disadvantage in the Early Years

Tackling Disadvantage in the Early Years, House of Commons Education Select Committee, 9th Report of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. HC 1006. Published on 7 February 2019 by the Stationery Office Limited.

The House of Commons Education Select Committee's report, Tackling Disadvantage in the Early Years, pointed out that the barriers to progression for early years teachers must be removed to encourage the recruitment and retention of a skilled, high-quality early years workforce. The Committee recommended that early years teachers should be able to access Qualified Teacher Status via a specialist route.

The Committee suggested that as there was a lack of clarity on progression routes and quality of apprenticeships in childcare, the Government should commission quality research on training provision, induction and coaching for apprenticeships in childcare, as well as professional development for those already in the profession who were seeking to progress.

The Committee said it had been disappointed that the DfE had chosen not to fulfil its commitment to conducting the early years workforce feasibility study. It urged the Government to recognise the difference that a highly skilled workforce would make to narrowing the quality gap between disadvantaged and more affluent areas. The Committee also urged the Government to justify its failure to conduct the early years workforce feasibility study and to either reconsider its decision not to go ahead with the study or provide a suitable alternative.

The report pointed out that as the Government did not appear to have an early years workforce strategy, which encompassed recruitment, quality and retention, it should develop one at the earliest opportunity. The Committee had found that maintained nursery schools were extremely successful at ensuring excellent outcomes for disadvantaged children and while their success was not limited to their catchment area, it could have positive outcomes for provision across the local area.

The Committee stressed that maintained nursery

schools must be supported to ensure that disadvantaged children were given the best possible start to life, and that given their importance, the Committee was concerned that funding for maintained nursery schools was set to decrease substantially in 2020 unless the Government committed to additional funding.

The Committee warned that maintained nursery schools could not wait until the Spending Review, as funding decisions regarding staff and places for the next academic year were currently being made, and the transitional funding that had already been provided was running out. The Committee therefore recommended that the Government should set out plans for, and commit to, fully funding maintained nursery schools by the end of the financial year.

Given the ability of maintained nurseries to spread expertise, the Committee recommended that local authorities should encourage cooperation between maintained nursery schools and nurseries in the private and voluntary sector. It also call upon local authorities to broker relationships between maintained nurseries and nurseries in the private and voluntary sector to enable them to "buy in" support, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities, or those who required extra support.

The Committee argued that the Government's 30 hours funded childcare policy was entrenching inequality rather than closing the gap and it recommended that the Government should review its 30 hours childcare policy to address the perverse consequences for disadvantaged children. The Committee suggested that the Government should reduce the earnings cap for the 30 hours childcare and use the extra funding to provide early education for disadvantaged children.

The report stressed that support for parents before and after birth was a key starting point for ensuring good life chances for children. Because the Committee believed that home visits from health visitors was a crucial part of the support, it recommended that the Government should ensure that local authorities were collecting full and complete data on the number of home visitors and home visits conducted in their area and provide additional funding if necessary.

The Committee recommended that the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care should develop a health in maternity strategy to cover the first 1,001 critical days from conception to the age of two. It also encouraged the Government to make more comprehensive and

needs- and evidence-led use of children's centres including utilising contact time with registrars and signposting parents to relevant support services.

The Committee argued that developing communication and language ability in the early years was crucial for children's outcomes and the home learning environment had a huge part to play in supporting children to develop such skills. It added that interventions to support the home learning environment should have a particular focus on communication and language.

The Committee suggested that the Government should build upon the evidence in Greater Manchester where every child was assessed eight times between 0–5 years old, including for speech and language development, and interventions followed as necessary.

The Committee said it had been concerned to hear of the lack of evidence about interventions that would support parents and families in creating a positive home learning environment. It stressed that interventions must be based on solid evidence and rigorous evaluation, to ensure that activity and funding was not being wasted on efforts that may not be effective. The Committee recommended that the Government should commission research on interventions to support effective home learning environments, which should be published and used as the evidence base from which to decide which projects to support.

As the Committee believed that parental engagement and involvement in the home learning environment was crucial to children's development, it recommended that the Government should commission research on interventions that would support parents in providing a strong home learning environment for their children. The Committee had been told about the positive effects of children's centres on children's life chances, and it recommended that the Department for Education should resurrect its review of children's centres and develop a wider, comprehensive strategy for provision of high quality and effective early years services.

To create a wider strategy, the Committee suggested that the DfE should explore promoting family hubs as a wider model for provision of integrated services and it recommended that Ofsted inspections of children's centres should be reinstated. The Committee welcomed the cross-government working group, chaired by the Leader of the House of Commons, which would review how to improve the support

available to families in the period around childbirth to the age of 2. The Committee urge the Leader and her working group to be ambitious and radical with their recommendations.

Early Years Intervention

Evidence-based Early Years Intervention: Government's Response to the Committee's 11th Report of Session 2017/19, the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons 15th report of Session 2017/19, HC 1898.

This report is in a slightly unusual form. Normally select committees publish their reports and the Government responds, with the response published by the committee as a special report. The Science and Technology Committee has not done that. It has published the Government's response, but at the same time it has published its reaction to that response, as a further report of the Committee. This is because the Committee were less than impressed with the Government's response, which rejected its central recommendation.

The Committee's original report, *Evidence-based Early Years Intervention,* HC 506, published on 14 November 2018, had highlighted the correlation between experience of adversity or trauma in childhood and the prevalence of encountering a range of problems in later life, including physical and mental health problems, reduced educational attainment and increased involvement with the criminal justice system.

The report had emphasised the ability of early intervention to reduce the chance of children encountering adverse experiences and to mitigate the long-term impact of such experiences. It also referred to the potential for effective early intervention to save the Government money, with the cost of late intervention estimated to be at least £16.6bn each year in England and Wales. Although the Committee had found examples of good practice across the country, the Early Intervention Foundation gave evidence to the Committee that, through their work, they had encountered "lots of examples where we see a gap between what we know from robust, peer-reviewed literature and what happens in local services and systems".

Where services are not being delivered according to the latest evidence, vulnerable families are not being supported as well as they could be and precious public resource is being wasted on ineffective programmes. The Committee observed: "Given the opportunity for improved provision of early

intervention focusing on childhood adversity and trauma to transform people's lives and save taxpayers' money, we are disappointed with the Government's Response to our Report. Rejecting our central recommendation for a new national strategy for early intervention addressing childhood adversity and trauma, the Government told us that: 'This Government believes that local areas are best placed to understand the needs of their local communities, to commission early intervention services to meet those needs and to deliver interventions as part of a whole system approach to produce the best outcomes for families.' However, the publication of a national strategy would not have to run contrary to this locally-led approach. Instead, a new strategy could have raised the awareness and ambition among local authorities with regards to adversity-focused early intervention, provided guidance and described best practice, and established a central team to support local authorities."

The Committee had taken evidence from Dr Jeanelle de Gruchy, the President of the Association of Directors of Public Health, who had said that more strategic, overarching national direction "would be a very helpful framework for what then comes down to local level, and for what we do and how we join it up locally". The Committee felt that a new strategy could also have supported an "improved locally-led approach by expanding the Government's oversight of the early intervention services provided by local authorities to tackle childhood adversity and trauma."

Mark Davies, Director of Population Health at the Department of Health and Social Care, also gave evidence to the Committee. He had accepted that "the Early Intervention Foundation has given us good information about what works, but we have not looked systematically at how that is applied".

The Committee felt that the Government's response "largely repeats the original Government evidence to the inquiry about ongoing programmes. For example, the Government lists multiple programmes that it said illustrated its commitment and practical approach to early intervention. However, while these programmes pursue laudable aims, most of them do not focus on childhood adversity and trauma."

The Committee welcomed the formation of the cross-Government ministerial working group on family support from conception to the age of two. It urged this new group to consider the opportunity to improve the provision and oversight

of early intervention addressing childhood adversity and trauma in England. The Committee recommended that the new ministerial group should consider the Committee's original 11th Report of Session 2017– 19 and write to it within three months to respond to its recommendations, and to outline:

- What specific actions it will recommend that the Government takes to improve the provision and oversight of evidence-based early intervention addressing childhood adversity and trauma in England, and whether it will recommend a national strategy, as proposed in our Eleventh Report of session 2017–19.
- What specific objectives for improvement on evidence-based early intervention addressing childhood adversity and trauma it wants the Government to achieve.
- How it, or the Government, will monitor the progress made in these Endeavours.

Concern Over Brexit and Erasmus and Horizon

Brexit: The Erasmus and Horizon Programmes, House of Lords European Union Committee, 28th report of Session 2017-19, HL Paper 283, Published by the Authority of the House of Lords on 12 February 2019.

This report explores the implications of Brexit for UK participation in the EU's flagship programme for research and innovation, Horizon 2020, and the EU's international mobility programme, Erasmus+, which provides opportunities for young people and teaching staff to study, work, and train abroad.

The UK is "a respected and important partner in both the Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 programmes". It is a popular destination for mobility placements and a world leader in research, with an exceptionally strong science base. In return, the UK receives substantial amounts of funding, access to professional networks, and opportunities to connect and collaborate with European partners built over decades of cooperation under the shared framework of the Erasmus and Horizon programmes.

As an EU Member State, the UK has access now to all Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 funding programmes. The Withdrawal Agreement would maintain this access, and UK participation in Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 would continue largely unchanged until both programmes draw to a close at the end of 2020,
which coincides with the expected end of the transition period.

In preparation for a 'no deal' scenario, the Committee noted that the Government has committed to underwrite funding from EU programmes until the end of 2020. Yet the Government still needs to agree terms with the EU for UK organisations to continue to participate in Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 projects as third country entities. The Committee was concerned to learn that the European Commission has thus far been unwilling to engage in discussions on 'no deal' contingency plans, and urged both parties to work together to avoid disruption to research projects and UK and EU nationals on Erasmus+ placements. There is an urgent need for greater clarity on how

the Government intends the underwrite guarantee to operate in practice, including who will disburse the funding and what conditions will apply to beneficiaries.

The Committee felt that the UK's research community was particularly concerned that in a 'no deal' scenario the loss of access to key sources of Horizon 2020 funding, including the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, are not open to third country participation and so are not covered by the Government's underwrite guarantee. The Government's own statistics show that grants from these programmes account for about 44% of total UK receipts from Horizon 2020. The UK and the EU will need to establish arrangements to maintain the free flow of data and regulatory alignment for clinical trials and chemical registration, which are essential to facilitating international research collaboration.

Whether the UK leaves the EU under the Withdrawal Agreement or in a 'no deal' scenario, the Committee noted that it could still seek to participate in the successor programmes to Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020, Erasmus and Horizon Europe, which will run from 2021 to 2027—as a third country. The Committee believed that it was in the UK and the EU's mutual interest to preserve current close levels of cooperation on research and innovation and educational mobility, and that the UK should participate fully in the Erasmus and Horizon Europe programmes as an associated third country.

Associate membership would not give the UK voting rights in the committees which oversee the strategic planning of the programmes, and so the UK would have less influence over the priorities and future development of Erasmus and Horizon Europe than would EU Member States. However, the strength of the UK's science base should help to ensure that the UK remains an influential player. As for Erasmus, the Committee was "struck by the stark warning that mobility opportunities for people in vocational education and training would 'stop in their tracks' without Erasmus funding", and it was particularly concerned that losing access to the programme would disproportionately affect people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with medical needs or disabilities.

The Committee urged the Government to confirm whether it will seek full association to the 2021–2027 Erasmus and Horizon Europe programmes as soon as possible, to maximise certainty and stability for UK students and researchers, and to enable them to plan for any changes.

Closing the Regional Attainment Gap

Closing the Regional Attainment Gap, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility, 20 February 2019.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility's inquiry into the regional attainment gap across England was initiated in late 2017 to explore the origins of differences in school outcomes between areas, what efforts had been made to close the gap, what could be learned from best practice and how it could be shared and implemented.

The report includes a map which shows GCSE performance and attainment gaps between free school meal eligible pupils and non-FSM pupils for local authorities in England. The key findings included:

• Disadvantaged pupils nationally lagged behind the average by around half a grade per subject, but those in London performed about the same as the average student nationally. Disadvantaged pupils in the North East had the lowest scores, but there was not a simple north/south divide, as the South East and South West both performed poorly for their disadvantaged pupils. The South East had an attainment gap twice the size of Inner London.

• The London Challenge had been successful because it had brought together local players who had a vested interest in improving local outcomes. While some of the success had been replicated in Somerset and Manchester, there had been less buy-in from national government and schemes were therefore mostly locally supported. Buy-in both at a national and local level was important as it allowed local areas to interpret and shape national policy in a way that would work for them.

• Whilst there had been pockets of local collaboration across the country, sharing best practice consistently and widely was more challenging. However, facilitating the sharing of best practice was key to local improvement.

• School funding had a larger impact on disadvantaged pupils and it could make a significant difference to their achievement at school.

• Questions remained as to whether schools had been using their funding effectively, particular in terms of the spending of the pupil premium.

• Disadvantaged young people were more likely to be taught by teachers who were less experienced and had lower qualifications. A young person in the most affluent schools was 22 percentage points more likely to be taught physics by someone who had a degree in physics or related subject than a young person in a disadvantaged school.

• Recruitment and retention of teachers was a bigger challenge in the most disadvantaged schools and geographical areas with higher levels of deprivation and the lack of opportunities for continuing professional development was a particular issue when it came to retaining teachers.

• The inquiry heard how children had held on to the gains they had make in early years education throughout their lives.

• Current government policy has shifted the focus from good quality early years education to a focus on providing childcare to enable parents to work. This has affecting the quality of early years settings.

The report recommended that:

• Local authorities should harness a sense of place through stronger collaboration across the whole system (including between schools, universities, local services, businesses). This should be done by providing additional funding to cold-spot areas so that they could take on the role of local coordinators in driving school improvement and supporting schools to work together.

• To be rated as Outstanding, schools must highlight that they were collaborating with other schools in the local area and Ofsted must recognise and evaluate that in its inspections.
• The Government should encourage school collaboration by

repurposing the Pupil Premium into a new Social Mobility Premium which schools and senior leaders could use on initiatives to improve social mobility in deprived schools and cold-spot areas. This could be used on teacher recruitment and retention in specific subject shortage areas, CPD for teachers, mentoring and peer to peer support.

• The Government should follow through on their ambitious new recruitment and retention strategy and support schools in social mobility cold-spot areas to offer a more generous financial incentive, combined with a strong offer of additional professional development to teachers to encourage them to take up positions there.

• The Government should complete the long-promised review of the children's centre programme and publish a reinvigorated National Strategy on children's centres in 2019. The Government should also ringfence funding for children's centres and ensure that they were able to reconnect with their original purpose and focus on the 0-5 age range.

• The Government should move towards giving early years teachers Qualified Teacher Status, with the increase in pay, conditions and status that it would entail, and it should invest in improving qualifications for all practitioners in the sector. A dedicated funding pot, similar to the old Graduate Leader Fund, would be important to achieving that.

Labour MP, Justin Madders, chairman of the APPG on social mobility, said that social background and geography were still huge influences on educational success and it would require a combination of big picture thinking and local understanding to change the situation. He pointed out that as this area had its own challenges, the Group would like to see more focus on local collaboration between schools, local authorities and universities, harnessing the successes of the London Challenge, and with a focus on social mobility cold-spots.

Mr Madders added that equally, there needed to be policy change at a national level, such as repurposing the Pupil Premium into a new Social Mobility Premium, which would send a strong signal that there was Government determination, backed by resources, to deliver improvements in social mobility.
Liberal Democrat Baroness Tyler, co-chairman of the APPG on

social mobility, said that while there were indications that the attainment gap was narrowing, at its current rate, it would take over 40 years to close the gap between disadvantaged five-year-olds and their more advantaged counterparts. She added that progress was also spread unevenly across the country and London had been significantly ahead of the rest in raising the attainment of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This is not a select committee report and Education Journal Review does not normally review All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) reports. We include this because the subject matter is one that has attracted growing interest within education.

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