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Correspondence about editorial matters should be sent to the editor, Demetri Coryton, at info@educationpublishing.com

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<td>£240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contents

1 Preface

2 The impact of research evidence on education policy: how MPs respond to evidence in relation to secondary selective education
   Alan Bainbridge, Joanne Bartley and Tom Troppe

12 SPI-M-O consensus view on the impact of mass school closures on COVID-19
   SPI-M-O

16 SPI-M-O consensus view on the potential effect of school closure on a UK COVID-19 epidemic
   Imperial College, London & others

20 Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand
   Imperial College, London

32 Timing of the introduction of school closure for COVID-19 epidemic suppression
   Imperial College, London

34 The impact of school closures
   Warwick University

36 The impact of adding school closures to other distancing measures
   Nick Davies et al, LSHTM

41 Social mobility in education: a mixed picture
   Matt Bazzant, NFER

66 Ofsted’s in-depth study of remote education
   Ofsted

89 Select Committee Reports

90 Special Educational Needs
   Education Committee

93 Investigation into UTCs
   National Audit Office

98 Special Educational Needs
   Public Accounts Committee

103 University Technical Colleges
   Public Accounts Committee

107 SEND: Government response
   Education Committee

112 A-level results
   Education Committee

124 Children’s Commissioner
   Education Committee

126 Adult skills and lifelong learning
   Education Committee
Preface

This issue of *Education Journal Review*, like the last one published last December, is dominated by papers on various aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. An unprecedented number of papers were produced in record time mainly by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and its sub-groups like SPI-M-O, or by universities commissioned by SAGE. These papers were unusual in a number of ways. They were not peer reviewed at the time of publication, as there was not time, and they were produced initially anonymously.

We have selected a small number of papers that were presented to SAGE about a year ago. The aim is to show what was known at the time that crucial decisions about lock-down and school closures were being made. There was a lot of talk at the time about following the science. What is clear from these papers is just how little science knew, and just how fast things developed. Some of the early modelling was based on work done 15 years earlier for an influenza pandemic. Science did not have all the answers, and decisions were of necessity political.

The majority of the papers published here are those that were presented to SAGE, but SAGE was not the only source of interesting research. This year Ofsted has produced an in-depth study of remote education, which had come rapidly to the fore during the pandemic.

The pandemic has also drawn attention to some issues that have always been there, but have been made worse by COVID-19. Matt Bazzant of NFER contributes an article on social mobility through an educational lens, which is just such an issue.

While COVID dominated the headlines there were other issues not connected with it. Alan Bainbridge, Joanne Bartley and Tom Troppe contribute a paper on the impact of research evidence on education policy in relation to secondary selective education.

**Demitri Coryton**
Editor
April 2021

By Dr. Alan Bainbridge, Joanne Bartley and Tom Troppe

Abstract: A detailed analysis of Hansard transcripts was undertaken to explore the dialogue used in parliamentary debates and committee meetings where reference was made to grammar schools between October 2015 to March 2019. During this period, the first new grammar school for 50 years had been approved along with the establishment of the £50 million Selective School Expansion Fund. Detailed qualitative analysis highlighted the widely disproportionate use of the term ‘good’ in relation to grammar schools. It is argued that ‘good’ instead of ‘outstanding’ or ‘excellent’ is chosen in relation to grammar schools as ‘good’ has moral overtones that go beyond reported educational standards. Proportionately the number of comprehensive schools rated good or outstanding, would need to be referred to in conjunction with ‘good’ 6698 times, not the 49 times this actually happened. Campaigners for comprehensive education need to reclaim the discourse of ‘goodness’ for all schools.

This is an updated version of a research report first published in Education Journal No. 447, published on 24 March 2021.

Key words: selection, comprehensives, grammar schools, 11+.
The evidence on the inequity of 11-plus testing has been clear for many years, and now as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schooling, even the keenest fans of selective education can no longer ignore this unfairness (Bercow, 2020). Additionally, in these difficult times it is the responsibility of our elected members to use the evidence presented to them to make informed decisions that will benefit all children.

In this paper we present new evidence to help understand the story behind the continued existence of selective secondary education, that since its inception as part of the tripartite education system in England and Wales, which followed the now obsolete 1944 Education Act, has refused to go away. We shall provide novel insight into how evidence is used in policy making while also exposing a moral discourse of ‘selective = good / non-selective = bad’ through a detailed analysis of the dialogue used in these debates. The ‘stickiness’ of the grammar school debate will be shown not to be associated by adherence to evidential rigour but instead to a dubious moral claim.

The 11-plus based system had detractors from its inception (Gillard, 2018) and by 1965 the then government ordered Local Authorities (LAs) to end academic selection and to move towards a system of comprehensive education. The vast majority of LAs began converting existing grammar and secondary modern schools into comprehensives, although this transformation was slowed down in 1970 when the government withdrew the compulsion to convert. To date 12 English LAs have resisted comprehensive secondary schooling, with Buckinghamshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, and several smaller authorities maintaining and supporting selective education in 163 grammar schools. This is where the ‘sticky’ grammar school debate has become stuck and continues to dominate thinking in education policy beyond the expected influence of a tiny number of Local Authorities.

This research seeks to understand why: despite the dearth of local authorities making claims to return to selective secondary education, and alongside an overwhelming evidence base for comprehensive education; some local authorities still promote 11-plus style selection. Calls are made to return to selective schools (Asthana and Elgot, 2016), and significant recent government funding (Great Britain. DfE, 2018) has been made available only for expansion of grammar schools. Given
the current government’s mantra for education policy to be ‘evidence-based’ so that ‘every child should have the chance to succeed in life’ (Conservative Party, 2019), our focus is on how members of both Houses of Parliament respond to and use evidence in debates that are centred on or revolve around calls to increase the number of grammar schools.

Our research approach: what we did and why
Our primary source of information came from transcriptions recorded in Hansard between October 2015 to March 2019 as this represents a period during which the first new grammar school for 50 years had been approved through to the establishment of the £50 million Selective School Expansion Fund. All debates within the House of Commons, the House of Lords and parliamentary committees that were either focussed on or mentioned grammar schools were analysed using a qualitative analysis software package (Nvivo). The analysis identified the main themes discussed during the debates, while the dialogue associated with the presentation of evidence was analysed to explore how arguments were developed and responded to.

Figure 1 below shows the consistency and peaks of grammar schools being debated or included in parliamentary debates.

![Figure 1. References to the word ‘grammar’ in Parliament (Hansard) during the past 5 years:](image)

Grammar debates: parliamentary themes
During this period 326 debates associated with grammar schools were analysed identifying the themes referred to.
Dozens of themes emerged, broadly similar in the Commons, Lords or committee environment, the most frequently mentioned are selection (195 times); good schools (164 times) – showing an interesting distinction between the Conservative Party (125x) and Labour Party (30x); evidence was brought up on 160 occasions, while the link to disadvantage and social privilege occurred 91 times.

What is interesting about these themes is the surprising prevalence of the term ‘good’ within these debates. It would be expected that, by definition, selection would feature highly as would disadvantage and social privilege as grammar schools are frequently presented as means to overcome disadvantage and the influence of the socially privileged.

The ‘Good School’ discourse: some words
A discussion of the ‘good school’ discourse is valuable as it highlights the tensions between basing policy on evidence or moral assumptions (Stevens, 2019). We shall discuss understandings of evidence later but for now our focus is on how ‘good’ is used in parliamentary debates on grammar schools. It is our contention that supporters of selective education either wilfully or unconsciously, ignore the evidence they propt to base policy on in favour of something more ambiguous. Yet, ‘goodness’ can also be used to capture the public imagination influencing conceptions of both selective and non-selective schooling. By continually referencing grammar schools as ‘good’ simply confirms a moral judgement that by default dismisses all other schools as ‘bad’, with the additional advantage of not having to articulate a narrative of ‘badness’ alongside potential implications of losing voters.

The appropriation of goodness is particularly potent in the English educational context: it is both an official Ofsted ranking, yet it also carries connotations of moral goodness that cannot be ignored. The term ‘outstanding’, despite also being an Ofsted ranking and speaking more to a standards agenda is seldom used, neither are equally comparable (although non-Ofsted terms), such as ‘high-performing’ or ‘high-achieving’.

The latter two are also less morally ambiguous and could be used instead of ‘good’. But it is the ‘good schools’ discourse that dominates this debate. One such example would be: “I want to establish a thread to run through the debate—that grammar schools are simply good schools and that we need good schools to flourish.”
(Gareth Johnson MP, HC Deb, 13 January 2015). Such statements – “that grammar schools are simply good schools” – provide no space for debate or inclusion of evidence and are indeed overly simplistic, if only in the assumption that all other ‘good’ schools are not as worthy as grammar schools.

**Some numbers**

Many similar quotes could be included but for the sake of brevity, we turn our focus on numbers to back up our case for the damaging disorientating dominance of a goodness discourse. Grammar schools, despite being fewer than 5% of all secondary schools, are named *more than 9 times* more often in Parliament than their majority non-selective counterparts. Over the past 5 years:

- **37% of the time** when grammar schools are mentioned, it occurs in conjunction with the word ‘good’.
- **For every grammar school rated good or outstanding, the word ‘good’ was used in Parliament at a rate of 235%**.
- **For every comprehensive school rated good or outstanding, the word ‘good’ was used in Parliament at a rate of 1.7%**.

The terrible irony is that despite such obvious and extreme discrepancies being as subtle as the proverbial bull in a china shop, this represents an astonishing unwillingness by those who support selection to utter the words and admit that “non-selective schools can be good”. If the same choice of words were to be used to represent proportionately the number of comprehensive schools rated good or outstanding, comprehensive schools would need to be referred to in conjunction with ‘good’ 6698 times over those 5 years, not the 49 times this actually happened.

**The ‘good schools’ discourse in £££s**

If the above is not shockingly dramatic enough, we shall, playfully, push our argument home a little more forcefully. We acknowledge what is to follow is fantasy, but the inherent logic exposes the power of the dominant selective school = good discourse, and indeed one particular type of selective school, is more worthy than all other good schools.
Financially, the £50 million earmarked for the Selective School Expansion Fund if applied to each of the 161 (ish) ‘good grammars’ (this includes Ofsted rankings of Good and Outstanding) (Full Fact, 2016) would provide £310,559 extra funding per school. If the logic of allowing good schools to expand, simply in relation to Ofsted rankings – after all this is the government approved standard – were applied to all good schools, then this would correspond to:

• The 2,850 good and outstanding comprehensive schools it could be expected that £885,093,150 (2,850 x £310,559) would be budgeted for their expansion.

• 91% of the 20,925 primary schools (19,041 schools) are rated good and outstanding. Therefore, they would receive £5,913,353,919—almost £6 billion.

• And the 2,915 good and outstanding nurseries would receive £905,279,485.

• Actual total expansion budget for good schools: £7,703,726,554.

We accept this is fantasy, for example, we have not accounted for pupil numbers or additional education need, but our point is a logical one. Selective education and in particular grammar schools are over-represented through the discourse of goodness in Parliamentary debates. In the government’s own approved evidenced world of Ofsted, grammar schools receive a vastly disproportionate amount of interest and financial resource. If all other good schools were to be treated in a similar fashion an extra £8 billion budget on education to expand good schools would not be unreasonable!

**Are some schools ‘more good’ than others?**

Grammar schools, evidenced by Ofsted, are good schools, so the ‘good schools’ claim cannot be refuted, and we do not wish to do so. But we do question why the goodness attributed to them is more worthy of recognition and reward than other good schools. Grammar schools are only 0.6% of all good schools.

If this debate (and the policy decisions) were about supporting and promoting evidenced educational standards, then the term ‘outstanding’ would be the defining terminology.
Instead ‘good’ is the chosen term and ‘good’ has moral overtones that go beyond reported educational standards. Whether the logic is articulated or not it seems that grammar schools = good schools = selective schools = good schools. It is a circular self-fulfilling argument. Likewise, and certainly not articulated is the logic that; non-selective schools = not good schools = comprehensive = non-good schools. Another circular self-fulfilling argument, only this time with damaging consequences for the 99.4% of good schools not deemed good enough for selective expansion.

It would seem that those who promote and support selective education in parliamentary debates are in fact very selective themselves: only this time they have decided to select certain types of good schools and to de-select the evidence-base that would shine a light on their illogical decision making. We would question whether the hugely disproportionate discourse of goodness around selective education is therefore associated more with, at the very least, a mis-conceived worldview of morally ‘good schools’, an unwillingness to accept comprehensive education, or a deliberate refutation of the very source of evidence that schools are ultimately judged by. It would appear that the later may will be the case, and as we will show below, in some instance MPs can be seen to engage with evidence.

Is all evidence ignored?

It is perplexing that the discussion above indicates that a moral judgment is being made about the goodness of certain types of school – irrespective of evidence. It can be considered even more insidious as our research also identified times when evidence is presented, listened, and responded to. In the Education and Social Mobility Debate (House of Commons, 22 Nov 2016), Judith Cummins MP presented evidence that refuted the common argument that grammar schools are vital engines of social mobility.

There is no evidence, no justification and no basis for the belief that selective education leads to improved social mobility. The House does not have to take my word for it; the Government’s own advisory body on social mobility, the Social Mobility Commission, says that grammar schools do not work.

Since that debate, we are not aware of any MP who has tried to defend grammar schools as a source of social mobility and indeed the above quote uses evidence to refute arguments
that selection improves social mobility. The earlier assertion that our elected members might be selective as to which evidence they do or do not use appears more plausible and led us to analyse how MPs respond to the evidence presented in parliamentary debates.

Our analysis found that on the occasions when evidence is presented, it is only actively engaged with 32% of the time, equally evidence is simply ignored (32%) and 21% of the instances just become an opportunity to attack the opposite party’s policy/debate. Of particular concern are the 26% of cases that when the evidence is not engaged with, or used politically, the respondent instead reverts to taking a personally held moral position that ‘grammar schools are good schools.’ Thus, dismissing the other 99.4% of evidenced good schools and ignoring the DfE’s aim ‘to align policy changes with the best research evidence available’ (Coldwell, et al., 2017, p. 9).

A summary and a way forward
The moral discourse of ‘good schools’ dominates debate and guides policy. Hence, the government (and no doubt certain Local Authorities) base their selective secondary education policy more on moral assumptions of ‘good schools’ than on evidence. The social mobility debate showed the greatest use of, and engagement with the evidence, providing support to our claim that supporters of selective education are trapped within the discourse of goodness. And, regardless of the evidence that is presented, they are unwilling to recognise and accept good in any other type of schooling.

There is a challenge for those of us, and particularly elected members, who support a system of state education not driven by outmoded ideas of selection and the appropriation of moral superiority towards grammar schools. That is to reclaim the discourse of ‘goodness’ for all good schools, and what can be more morally good than the desire for our young children not to be segregated into different types of schooling as the result of a short fallible test at the age of 10.

To a large extent, reporting our research has already begun to disrupt the morally ‘good’ discourse of selective education and ‘the emperor has been exposed walking naked through the streets’. The real moral tragedy though is that the 11-plus is not a fantastical fairy tale; it is actually implemented early in September every year to around 100,000 children, many of whom had their 10th birthday a few weeks before. Let
us hold these children in mind and once and for all, reject silly playground notions of “my school is ‘more good’ than your school”.

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SPI-M-O Consensus View on the Impact of Mass School Closures on COVID-19

By the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling, Operational sub-group (SPI-M-O)

Abstract: This paper is a consensus view from the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling, Operational sub-group (SPI-M-O) for the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE). The paper was discussed at SAGE meeting number 17 on 18 March 2020. It was published on 22 May 2020 and the latest version was issued on Sunday 7 June 2020. The paper represents the consensus view on the effect of the first school closure programme on the spread of COVID-19 at that time, in June 2020, following the lock-down in March 2020. Some schools remained open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children.

Key words: COVID-19, school closure, influenza, serial interval

SPI-M-O have considered the impact that school closures would have on curtailing the spread of COVID-19, to avoid NHS critical care capacity being breached. SPI-M-O have previously given consensus views on school closures. These were given in SPI-M-O: Consensus view on the impact of mass school closures on COVID-19, from 19 February 2020, and SPI-M-O: Consensus view on the impact of mass school closures on 2019 Novel Coronavirus, from 10 February 2020.

There is clear evidence from the literature that school closures can interrupt the spread of respiratory viruses. These studies have tended to focus on pandemic influenza. In the 2009 influenza pandemic, the school summer holiday interrupted transmission to such an extent that the UK epidemic was
split into two waves, with the second coming after their reopening in the Autumn.

The impact of school closures, as a stand-alone policy, on COVID-19 would be expected to be smaller than for influenza, because:

- The relative role of children in transmission is likely to be smaller. In influenza pandemics adults have some pre-existing immunity, so that a higher proportion occurs in schools.

- The average time between symptom onset in primary and secondary cases (known as the serial interval) is longer than for influenza. As a result, schools would have to be closed for longer to have the same effect.

- The reproduction number is estimated to be in the range 2.0-2.5, which is higher than influenza in 2009.

Assessment of the role of children in the transmission of COVID-19

There is still a great deal of uncertainty around the extent to which children have a role in the transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Based on estimates of people with subclinical infections, infected children could be an average of 25% to 75% as likely to transmit SARS-CoV-2 per contact than adults.

Assessment of whether national school closures would prevent NHS critical care capacity being breached

On 16 March, SPI-M-O’s consensus view was that “it is unclear whether or not the addition of general social distancing measures to case isolation, household isolation and social distancing of vulnerable groups would curtail the epidemic by reducing the reproduction number to less than 1”.

The uncertainty is primarily because it is fundamentally not possible to determine in advance the extent to which “general social distancing measures” will change contact patterns and therefore viral spread.

It is the consensus view of SPI-M-O that, accounting for the polices announced on 16 March, and in the absence of school closures, NHS critical care capacity is likely or highly likely to be breached in the short to medium term. The reproduction number is expected to be in the region of 1 but we
do not know whether it will be higher or lower than that. The high degree of uncertainty is a result of not knowing how contact rates will change from 17 March, as well as the lack of clarity on current case numbers and the role of children in transmission.

It is almost certain that school closures will not make the epidemic worse, and that they would reduce both the epidemic peak and expected number of cases. Our best assessment is that they would reduce the reproduction number by between 10% and 20%. We do not know how likely it is that this will change the reproduction number from being above 1 to below 1.

Modelling from one group indicates that the difference between closing schools now compared to not reopening after the Easter holidays would be modest. Further work on this question will be presented at SAGE on 18 March.

**Assessment of whether regional school closures would prevent NHS critical care capacity being breached**
There may be a case for closing in schools in London ahead of those in the rest of the country; further work on this will be presented at SAGE on 18 March.

**Assessment of the impact of partial school closures would prevent NHS critical care capacity being breached**
Allowing schools to remain open for a small number of pupils would capture most of the benefit of closing them for the whole population. Given the high levels of uncertainty involved, it would not be meaningful to model the size of this effect.

Allowing exams to take place in otherwise closed schools would have only a marginal population-level impact on transmission.

**Assessment of the impact of social distancing within schools**
Some countries such as Singapore, have allowed schools to remain open whilst increasing social distancing within them. This is not something which could be meaningfully modelled.

**Assessment of the impact of children being cared for by other people**
In the event of school closures, some children may be cared for by older relatives, increasing the risk of transmission to those at
higher risk of needing critical care. Although there is an elevated direct personal risk to older people who care for children, it is highly likely that on a population level, the health benefit of school closures would outweigh this disbenefit.

A rapid literature review by Brooks et al. has shown that whilst school closures do appear to reduce the number of contacts that children have outside the home, such contacts remain common. Were children to congregate in day-care settings during a UK COVID-19 epidemic, the impact of school closures would be lower. Past data are based on short duration closures in different contexts (e.g. different countries, different levels of risk perception). The impact of longer-term closures, different risk perceptions, concurrent interventions and official communication campaigns on patterns of behaviour are likely to be different and cannot be determined by modelling alone.

**Duration of school closures**

There will be a lag of around 3-4 weeks between the introduction of school closures and the impact being seen on critical care capacity. This is because there is an average of around 2 weeks between someone being infected with the virus and presenting in critical care, and because the impact of school closures on critical care isn’t realised directly by children avoiding infection, but because this means that they do not go on to infect other people.

School closures would need to last several months to maintain the effect seen.

**University closures**

The impact of closing universities is expected to be relatively small, because university students are a relatively small proportion of the UK population (around 2.5 million).

**Scope of modelling**

The consensus statement has drawn on modelling work from LSHTM, Imperial and Warwick and are based on all educational establishments. The LHSTM and Imperial work includes universities, but the Warwick work does not. None of the modelling includes pre-school care.
SPI-M-O Consensus View on the Potential Effect of School Closure on a UK COVID-19 Epidemic

By Imperial College, London and others

Abstract: This paper, produced by the WHO Collaborating Centre for Infectious Disease Modelling, MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis and the Jameel Institute for Disease and Emergency Analytics, Imperial College, London, was presented to the Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling, Operational sub-group (SPI-M-O), and then to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and considered at its 9th meeting on 20th February 2020. Published on Friday 12 June 2020. This paper demonstrated how little was known about the effects of the pandemic at this time.

Key words: COVID-19, school, household, transmission

We used an adapted version of the individual-based simulation previously used to inform UK influenza pandemic planning. This model has the following features:

• Spatially explicit and individually based: models the entire population of England, Scotland and Wales (64.4 million).

• Transmission in households, school/work locations, and other spatially local included.

• Distribution of schools and workplaces and distances travelled to each matched against national data.

• Household size and age distributions are matched to UK census data.
• Spatially localised transmission modelled using a gravity model to represent probability of contact, parameterised against GB mobility data, accounting for age variation.

• Proportion of transmission occurring in households and schools matched to influenza data. Transmission in workplaces assumed to occur at half the efficiency of schools. All other transmission assumed to be spatially local and mass action.

• In the absence of immunity, approximately 1/3 of transmission occurs in each of (a) households, (b) schools and workplaces, and (c) other spatially local contacts.

• The simulation includes an explicit representation of absenteeism - both due to sickness, and due to caring for sick (or well, in the case of school closure) children in the household.

• School holidays are included.

• The model broadly reproduces the age-dependent mixing rates seen in POLYMOD and similar data.

COVID-19 specific parameterisation
• For COVID-19, assume incubation period with mean 5.1 days, SD 4.4 days (estimated from traveller case data).

• Infectiousness assumed to start 0.5 days before symptom onset, follows a time varying infectiousness profile (which peaks 0.5 days after symptom onset) to give an overall generation time with mean 6.5 days, SD 3.8 days. This matches current estimates from contact tracing studies.

• Exponentially growing seeding of infection into the UK is modelled, with a 5-day doubling time. This study is not intended to examine the impact of case isolation, and results regarding school closure are not sensitive to seeding assumptions.

• Two-thirds of all infections assumed to be symptomatic (at least mildly). 25% of symptomatic children assumed to attend school, 50% of symptomatic adults to attend work.

• Symptomatic infections 1.5-fold more infectious than
asymptomatic, but 50% as likely to make spatially local contacts.

- R0 = 2.1 gave a 5-day epidemic doubling time.
- The researchers explore three parameter scenarios to examine the impact of school closure:

A. Children and adults equally susceptible to infection and equally likely to transmit. Closure of schools increases household contact rates by 25%, has no effect on other transmission.

B. Children and adults equally susceptible to infection and equally likely to transmit. Closure of schools increases household contact rates by 50%, increases spatially local other contacts by 25%.

C. Only 20% of under 20-year-olds symptomatic, average susceptibility of those under 20 assumed to be 75% of that of adults (increasing with age). Closure of schools increases household contact rates by 50%, increases spatially local other contacts by 25%.

School closure scenarios examined
The researchers consider national school closure triggered by national weekly symptomatic disease incidence triggers. They assume 90% of symptomatic disease can be detected (e.g. via a community-based surveillance system such as FluSurvey). They explore incidence triggers between 100 and 6,000 cases per 100,000 of population per week, and durations of closure between 2 weeks and 32 weeks. They vary R0 between 1.7 and 2.9. They evaluate impacts of school closure via three summary statistics:

(a) reduction in cumulative final symptomatic attack rate;
(b) reduction in peak symptomatic incidence;
(c) extent to which peak incidence is delayed.

Conclusions
- School closure needs to be carefully timed and started early, when incidence is < 5% of its peak value (e.g. 300 cases per 100,000 per week) for maximum impact.
• 8-12 weeks of closure are required for maximum reduction of peak incidence.

• However, such a closure period is predicted to achieve a reduction in peak incidence of >40% for the central estimate of R0 examined (2.1).

• School closure can achieve up to a ~20% in overall attack rate, but this typically requires 16 or more weeks of closure.

• For closure initiated early, peak incidence can be delayed by 1 to 3 weeks depending on scenario, for R0=2.1.

• Impact is reduced for larger R0 values, increased for smaller ones.
Impact of Non-pharmaceutical Interventions to Reduce COVID-19 Mortality and Healthcare Demand

By Imperial College, London

Abstract: This paper is one of four papers informing the SPI-M-O: Consensus view on behavioural and social interventions as published by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) at its 16th meeting on COVID-19. It was published on Friday 12 June 2020. The paper looked at the range of non-pharmaceutical interventions possible to deploy to reduce COVID-19 mortality and demand on the National Health Service. The last time that Britain and the world had faced an epidemic on the scale of COVID-19 was the influenza pandemic of 1918-19. The starting point for this paper was that pandemic and the actions, especially in the USA, of municipal authorities there that were able to take independent action including non-pharmaceutical interventions.

Key words: COVID-19, NPIs, influenza, 1918 pandemic.

The last time the world responded to a global emerging disease epidemic of the scale of the current COVID-19 pandemic with no access to vaccines was the 1918-19 H1N1 influenza pandemic. In that pandemic, some communities, notably in the United States, responded with a variety of nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) - measures intended to reduce transmission by reducing contact rates in the general population.

Examples of the measures adopted during this time included closing schools, churches, bars and other social venues. Cities in which these interventions were implemented
early in the epidemic were successful at reducing case numbers while the interventions remained in place and experiences lower mortality overall. However, transmission rebounded once controls were lifted. Most of the countries across the world face the same challenge today with COVID-19, a virus with comparable lethality to H1N1 influenza in 1918.

Two fundamental strategies are possible:

(a) Suppression. Here the aim is to reduce the reproduction number (the average number of secondary cases each case generates), R, to below 1 and hence to reduce case numbers to low levels or (as for SARS or Ebola) eliminate human-to-human transmission. The main challenge of this approach is that NPIs need to be maintained – at least intermittently - for as long as the virus is circulating in the human population, or until a vaccine becomes available. In the case of COVID-19, it will be at least a 12-18 months before a vaccine is available. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that initial vaccines will have high efficacy.

(b) Mitigation. Here the aim is to use NPIs (and vaccines or drugs, if available) not to interrupt transmission completely, but to reduce the health impact of an epidemic, akin to the strategy adopted by some US cities in 1918, and by the world more generally in the 1957, 1968 and 2009 influenza pandemics. In the 2009 pandemic, for instance, early supplies of vaccine were targeted at individuals with pre-existing medical conditions which put them at risk of more severe disease. In this scenario, population immunity builds up through the epidemic, leading to an eventual rapid decline in case numbers and transmission dropping to low levels.

The strategies differ in whether they aim to reduce the reproduction number (average number of secondary cases caused by each case), R, to below 1 (suppression) – and thus cause case numbers to decline – or to merely slow spread by reducing R, but not to below 1.

In this report, we consider the feasibility and implications of both strategies for COVID-19, looking at a range of NPI measures. It is important to note at the outset that given SARS-CoV-2 is a newly emergent virus, much remains to be understood about its transmission. In addition, the impact of many of the NPIs detailed here depends critically on how people respond to their introduction, which is highly likely to
vary between countries and even communities. Last, it is highly likely that there would be significant spontaneous changes in population behaviour even in the absence of government-mandated interventions.

We do not consider the ethical implications of either strategy here, except to note that there is no easy policy decision to be made. Suppression, while successful to date in China, carries with it enormous social and economic costs which may themselves have significant impact on health and wellbeing in the short and longer-term. Mitigation will never be able to completely protect those at risk from severe disease or death and the resulting mortality may therefore still be high. Instead we focus on feasibility, with a specific focus on what the likely healthcare system impact of the two approaches would be. We present results for the Great Britain (GB) and the United States of America (US), but they are equally applicable to most high-income countries.

Transmission Model
We modified an individual-based simulation model developed to support pandemic influenza planning to explore scenarios for COVID-19 in Great Britain. The basic structure of the model remains as previously published. In brief, individuals reside in areas defined by high-resolution population density data.

Contacts with other individuals in the population are made within the household, at school, in the workplace and in the wider community. Census data were used to define the age and household distribution size. Data on average class sizes and staff-student ratios were used to generate a synthetic population of schools distributed proportional to local population density.

Data on the distribution of workplace size was used to generate workplaces with commuting distance data used to locate workplaces appropriately across the population. Individuals are assigned to each of these locations at the start of the simulation.

Transmission events occur through contacts made between susceptible and infectious individuals in either the household, workplace, school or randomly in the community, with the latter depending on spatial distance between contacts. Per-capita contacts within schools were assumed to be double those elsewhere in order to reproduce the attack rates in
children observed in past influenza pandemics. With the parameterisation above, approximately one third of transmission occurs in the household, one third in schools and workplaces and the remaining third in the community. These contact patterns reproduce those reported in social mixing surveys.

We assumed an incubation period of 5.1 days. Infectiousness is assumed to occur from 12 hours prior to the onset of symptoms for those that are symptomatic and from 4.6 days after infection in those that are asymptomatic with an infectiousness profile over time that results in a 6.5-day mean generation time. Based on fits to the early growth-rate of the epidemic in Wuhan, we make a baseline assumption that $R_0=2.4$ but examine values between 2.0 and 2.6. We assume that symptomatic individuals are 50% more infectious than asymptomatic individuals. Individual infectiousness is assumed to be variable, described by a gamma distribution with mean 1 and shape parameter $\kappa=0.25$. On recovery from infection, individuals are assumed to be immune to re-infection in the short term. Evidence from the Flu Watch cohort study suggests that re-infection with the same strain of seasonal circulating coronavirus is highly unlikely in the same or following season.

Infection was assumed to be seeded in each country at an exponentially growing rate (with a doubling time of 5 days) from early January 2020, with the rate of seeding being calibrated to give local epidemics which reproduced the observed cumulative number of deaths in GB or the US seen by 14 March 2020.

**Disease Progression and Healthcare Demand**

Analyses of data from China as well as data from those returning on repatriation flights suggest that 40-50% of infections were not identified as cases. This may include asymptomatic infections, mild disease and a level of under-ascertainment. We therefore assume that two-thirds of cases are sufficiently symptomatic to self-isolate (if required by policy) within one-day of symptom onset, and a mean delay from onset of symptoms to hospitalisation of five days. The age-stratified proportion of infections that require hospitalisation and the infection fatality ratio (IFR) were obtained from an analysis of a subset of cases from China.

These estimates were corrected for non-uniform attack rates by age and when applied to the GB population result in an
IFR of 0.9% with 4.4% of infections hospitalised (Table 1). We assume that 30% of those that are hospitalised will require critical care (invasive mechanical ventilation or ECMO) based on early reports from COVID-19 cases in the UK, China and Italy (Professor Nicholas Hart, personal communication), with a mean duration from hospital admission to admission to critical care of 6 days.

Based on expert clinical opinion, we assume that 50% of those in critical care will die and an age-dependent proportion of those that do not require critical care die (calculated to match the overall IFR). We calculate bed demand numbers assuming a total duration of stay in hospital of 8 days if critical care is not required and an additional 10 days if critical care is required. With 30% of hospitalised cases requiring critical care, we obtain an overall mean duration of hospitalisation of 11.5 days, slightly shorter than the duration from hospital admission to discharge observed for COVID-19 cases internationally (who will have remained in hospital slightly longer to ensure negative tests at discharge) but in-line with estimates for general pneumonia admissions.

Non-Pharmaceutical Intervention Scenarios
We consider the impact of five different non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) implemented individually and in combination. In each case, we represent the intervention mechanistically within the simulation, using plausible and largely conservative (i.e. pessimistic) assumptions about the impact of each intervention and compensatory changes in contacts (e.g. in the home) associated with reducing contact rates in specific settings outside the household. The model reproduces the intervention effect sizes seen in epidemiological studies and in empirical surveys of contact patterns.

Two of the interventions (case isolation and voluntary home quarantine) are triggered by the onset of symptoms and are implemented the next day. The other four NPIs (social distancing of those over 65 years, social distancing of the entire population, stopping mass gatherings and closure of schools and universities) are decisions made at the government level. For these interventions we therefore consider surveillance triggers based on testing of patients in critical care (intensive care units, ICUs).

We focus on such cases as testing is most complete for the most severely ill patients. When examining mitigation
strategies, we assume policies are in force for three months, other than social distancing of those over the age of 70 which is assumed to remain in place for one month longer. Suppression strategies are assumed to be in place for five months or longer.

**Results**

In the (unlikely) absence of any control measures or spontaneous changes in individual behaviour, we would expect a peak in mortality (daily deaths) to occur after approximately three months. In such scenarios, given an estimated R0 of 2.4, we predict 81% of the GB and US populations would be infected over the course of the epidemic. Epidemic timings are approximate given the limitations of surveillance data in both countries: The epidemic is predicted to be broader in the US than in GB and to peak slightly later. This is due to the larger geographic scale of the US, resulting in more distinct localised epidemics across states than seen across GB. The higher peak in mortality in GB is due to the smaller size of the country and its older population compared with the US. In total, in an unmitigated epidemic, we would predict approximately 510,000 deaths in GB and 2.2 million in the US, not accounting for the potential negative effects of health systems being overwhelmed on mortality.

For an uncontrolled epidemic, we predict critical care bed capacity would be exceeded as early as the second week in April, with an eventual peak in ICU bed demand that is over 30 times greater than the maximum supply in both countries. The aim of mitigation is to reduce the impact of an epidemic by flattening the curve, reducing peak incidence and overall deaths (Figure 2). Since the aim of mitigation is to minimise mortality, the interventions need to remain in place for as much of the epidemic period as possible. Introducing such interventions too early risks allowing transmission to return once they are lifted (if insufficient herd immunity has developed); it is therefore necessary to balance the timing of introduction with the scale of disruption imposed and the likely period over which the interventions can be maintained.

In this scenario, interventions can limit transmission to the extent that little herd immunity is acquired – the most effective combination of interventions is predicted to be a combination of case isolation, home quarantine and social distancing of those most at risk (the over 70s). Whilst the latter has relatively less impact on transmission than other age
groups, reducing morbidity and mortality in the highest risk groups reduces both demand on critical care and overall mortality. In combination, this intervention strategy is predicted to reduce peak critical care demand by two-thirds and halve the number of deaths.

However, this “optimal” mitigation scenario would still result in an 8-fold higher peak demand on critical care beds over and above the available surge capacity in both GB and the US. Stopping mass gatherings is predicted to have relatively little impact (results not shown) because the contact-time at such events is relatively small compared to the time spent at home, in schools or workplaces and in other community locations such as bars and restaurants.

Overall, we find that the relative effectiveness of different policies is insensitive to the choice of local trigger (absolute numbers of cases compared to per-capita incidence), R0 (in the range 2.0-2.6), and varying IFR in the 0.25%-1.0% range.

Given that mitigation is unlikely to be a viable option without overwhelming healthcare systems, suppression is likely necessary in countries able to implement the intensive controls required. Our projections show that to be able to reduce R to close to 1 or below, a combination of case isolation, social distancing of the entire population and either school and university closure or household quarantine are required (Figure 3, Table 4). School closure is predicted to be more effective in achieving suppression than household quarantine (in addition to case isolation and social distancing).

When policies include closure of schools and universities, we predict a reduction in critical care requirements from a peak approximately three weeks after the interventions are introduced and a decline thereafter while the intervention policies remain in place. While there are many uncertainties in policy effectiveness, this is the only strategy in which we predict that critical care bed requirements would remain within surge capacity.

Adding household quarantine to case isolation and social distancing is the next best option, although we predict that there is a risk that surge capacity may be exceeded under this policy option combining all four interventions (social distancing of the entire population, case isolation, household quarantine and school and university closure) is predicted to have the largest impact, short of a complete lockdown which
additionally prevents people going to work.

Once interventions are relaxed (in the example in Figure 3, from September onwards), infections begin to rise, resulting in a predicted peak epidemic later in the year. The more successful a strategy is at suppression, the larger the later epidemic is predicted to be in the absence of vaccination, due to lesser build-up of herd immunity.

Given suppression policies may need to be maintained for many months, we examined the impact of an adaptive policy in which social distancing (plus school and university closure, if used) is only initiated after weekly confirmed case incidence in ICU patients (a group of patients highly likely to be tested) exceeds a certain "on" threshold, and is relaxed when ICU case incidence falls below a certain "off" threshold. Case-based policies of home isolation of symptomatic cases and household quarantine (if adopted) are continued throughout.

Such policies are robust to uncertainty in both the reproduction number, R0 and in the severity of the virus (i.e. the proportion of cases requiring ICU admission, not shown). Suppression policies are best triggered early in the epidemic, with a cumulative total of 200 ICU cases per week being the latest point at which policies can be triggered and still keep peak ICU demand below GB surge limits in the case of a relatively high R0 value of 2.6. Expected total deaths are also reduced for lower triggers, though deaths for all the policies considered are much lower than for an uncontrolled epidemic.

Social distancing (plus school and university closure, if used) need to be in force for the majority of the 2 years of the simulation, but that the proportion of time these measures are in force is reduced for more effective interventions and for lower values of R0. Total deaths are reduced with lower "off" triggers; however, this also leads to longer periods during which social distancing is in place. Peak ICU demand and the proportion of time social distancing is in place are not affected by the choice of “off" trigger.

Discussion
As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses, countries are increasingly implementing a broad range of responses. Our results demonstrate that it will be necessary to layer multiple interventions, regardless of whether suppression or mitigation is the overarching policy goal. However, suppression will require the layering of more intensive and socially disruptive
measures than mitigation. The choice of interventions ultimately depends on the relative feasibility of their implementation and their likely effectiveness in different social contexts.

Disentangling the relative effectiveness of different interventions from the experience of countries to date is challenging because many have implemented multiple (or all) of these measures with varying degrees of success. Through the hospitalisation of all cases (not just those requiring hospital care), China in effect initiated a form of case isolation, reducing onward transmission from cases in the household and in other settings. At the same time, by implementing widespread social distancing, the opportunity for onward transmission in all locations was rapidly reduced. Several studies have estimated that these interventions reduced $R$ to below 1. In recent days, these measures have begun to be relaxed. Close monitoring of the situation in China in the coming weeks will therefore help to inform strategies in other countries.

Overall, our results suggest that large-scale social distancing applied to the population as a whole would have the largest impact; and in combination with other interventions – notably home isolation of cases and school and university closure – has the potential to suppress transmission below the threshold of $R_{t}=1$ required to rapidly reduce case incidence. A minimum policy for effective suppression is therefore population-wide social distancing combined with home isolation of cases and school and university closure.

To avoid a rebound in transmission, these policies will need to be maintained until large stocks of vaccine are available to immunise the population – which could be 18 months or more. Adaptive hospital surveillance-based triggers for switching on and off large-scale social distancing and school closure offer greater robustness to uncertainty than fixed duration interventions and can be adapted for regional use (e.g. at the state level in the US). Given local epidemics are not perfectly synchronised, local policies are also more efficient and can achieve comparable levels of suppression to national policies while being in force for a slightly smaller proportion of the time. However, we estimate that for a national GB policy, social distancing would need to be in force for at least 2/3 of the time until a vaccine was available.

However, there are very large uncertainties around the transmission of this virus, the likely effectiveness of different policies and the extent to which the population spontaneously
adopts risk reducing behaviours. This means it is difficult to be definitive about the likely initial duration of measures which will be required, except that it will be several months. Future decisions on when and for how long to relax policies will need to be informed by ongoing surveillance.

The measures used to achieve suppression might also evolve over time. As case numbers fall, it becomes more feasible to adopt intensive testing, contact tracing and quarantine measures akin to the strategies being employed in South Korea today. Technology – such as mobile phone apps that track an individual’s interactions with other people in society – might allow such a policy to be more effective and scalable if the associated privacy concerns can be overcome. However, if intensive NPI packages aimed at suppression are not maintained, our analysis suggests that transmission will rapidly rebound, potentially producing an epidemic comparable in scale to what would have been seen had no interventions been adopted.

Long-term suppression may not be a feasible policy option in many countries. Our results show that the alternative relatively short-term (3-month) mitigation policy option might reduce deaths seen in the epidemic by up to half, and peak healthcare demand by two-thirds. The combination of case isolation, household quarantine and social distancing of those at higher risk of severe outcomes (older individuals and those with other underlying health conditions) are the most effective policy combination for epidemic mitigation. Both case isolation and household quarantine are core epidemiological interventions for infectious disease mitigation and act by reducing the potential for onward transmission through reducing the contact rates of those that are known to be infectious (cases) or may be harbouring infection (household contacts). The WHO China Joint Mission Report suggested that 80% of transmission occurred in the household, although this was in a context where interpersonal contacts were drastically reduced by the interventions put in place. Social distancing of high-risk groups is predicted to be particularly effective at reducing severe outcomes given the strong evidence of an increased risk with age though we predict it would have less effect in reducing population transmission.

We predict that school and university closure will have an impact on the epidemic, under the assumption that children do transmit as much as adults, even if they rarely experience
severe disease. We find that school and university closure is a more effective strategy to support epidemic suppression than mitigation; when combined with large-scale social distancing, the effect of school closure is to further amplify the breaking of social contacts between households, and thus suppress transmission. However, school closure is predicted to be insufficient to mitigate (never mind suppress) an epidemic in isolation; this contrasts with the situation in seasonal flu epidemics, where children are the key drivers of transmission due to adults having higher immunity levels.

The optimal timing of interventions differs between suppression and mitigation strategies, as well as depending on the definition of optimal. However, for mitigation, the majority of the effect of such a strategy can be achieved by targeting interventions in a three-month window around the peak of the epidemic. For suppression, early action is important, and interventions need to be in place well before healthcare capacity is overwhelmed.

Given the most systematic surveillance occurs in the hospital context, the typical delay from infection to hospitalisation means there is a 2- to 3-week lag between interventions being introduced and the impact being seen in hospitalised case numbers, depending on whether all hospital admissions are tested or only those entering critical care units. In the GB context, this means acting before COVID-19 admissions to ICUs exceed 200 per week.

Perhaps our most significant conclusion is that mitigation is unlikely to be feasible without emergency surge capacity limits of the UK and US health systems being exceeded many times over.

In the most effective mitigation strategy examined, which leads to a single, relatively short epidemic (case isolation, household quarantine and social distancing of the elderly), the surge limits for both general ward and ICU beds would be exceeded by at least 8-fold under the more optimistic scenario for critical care requirements that we examined. In addition, even if all patients were able to be treated, we predict there would still be in the order of 250,000 deaths in GB, and 1.1-1.2 million in the US.

In the UK, this conclusion has only been reached in the last few days, with the refinement of estimates of likely ICU demand due to COVID-19 based on experience in Italy and the UK (previous planning estimates assumed half the demand
now estimated) and with the NHS providing increasing certainty around the limits of hospital surge capacity.

We therefore conclude that epidemic suppression is the only viable strategy at the current time. The social and economic effects of the measures which are needed to achieve this policy goal will be profound. Many countries have adopted such measures already, but even those countries at an earlier stage of their epidemic (such as the UK) will need to do so imminently.

Our analysis informs the evaluation of both the nature of the measures required to suppress COVID19 and the likely duration that these measures will need to be in place. Results in this paper have informed policymaking in the UK and other countries in the last weeks. However, we emphasise that is not at all certain that suppression will succeed long-term; no public health intervention with such disruptive effects on society has been previously attempted for such a long duration of time. How populations and societies will respond remains unclear.
Timing of the introduction of School Closure for COVID-19 Epidemic Suppression

By the COVID-19 Response Team, Imperial College, London

Abstract: This short paper was produced by the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis at Imperial College, London. It uses a model first developed in 2005 for pandemic influenza planning. The paper was presented to the Scientific Advisory Committee for Emergencies (SAGE) on 18 March 2020 and published on 19 June 2020.

Key words: COVID-19, NPIs, healthcare, schools.

This work uses a spatially explicit individual based simulation of respiratory virus transmission in the entire GB population. The model was first previously developed for pandemic influenza planning [Ferguson et al., Nature, Nature, 2005. 437(7056): p. 209-14], including non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) [Halloran et al., PNAS, 2008. 105:4639-4644].

The model has been parametrised to reproduce current knowledge of COVID-19 epidemiology, including age dependence in severity and healthcare utilisation. Healthcare demand assumptions match NHSE models.

Calibration/timing

For RO=2.4, the simulation predicted 188 cases newly admitted to ICUs in the three days up to and including Tuesday 17 March. CHESS reported 196 admissions to that date. Model predicts 103 deaths by 17 March 2020 (55 by 14 March), while only 60 had been reported in the UK by that date. Temporal calibration therefore likely accurate to +/- three days, assuming surveillance data is reliable. If ICU cases and deaths have been under-ascertained, these results will be over-optimistic.
Current investigation packaged assumed to start on 17 March 2020. RO values between 2.2 and 2.6.

Interventions
The current package of interventions were assumed to start on 17 March 2020. Results are shown with that package alone and for that plus school and university closure, the latter starting with a range of delays between 0 and three weeks.

Results
RO values of 2.2, 2.4 and 2.6 examined. Results are qualitatively similar for each. Graph shows results for 2.4. We predict an increase of approximately 1,000 ICU cases in the peak week of the outbreak for every week of delay in introducing school closure. Starting school closure at Easter risks exceeding ICU surge capacity. School closure reduces R by between 0.4 and 0.5 (depending on baseline R0) and is required to bring R<1.
The Impact of School Closures

From Warwick University

Abstract: This short paper from Warwick University, which was presented to the Scientific Advisory Committee for Emergencies (SAGE) on 17 March 2020 and published on 19 June 2020, looked at the impact of school closures as a non-pharmaceutical intervention to counter the COVID-19 pandemic and was based on the Warwick Social Contact Survey.

Key words: COVID-19, schools, social distancing.

Warwick Social Contact Survey estimates that about 50% of school age children’s contact time is at school. If we assume that the time spent at school becomes time spent at home then secondary cases drop to ~60% (not as much because of repeated infection in the home environment).

If we account for the displacement of contacts due to the recent social distancing announcements this may drop slightly. My simplest estimates suggest ~58%.

Feeding this into our age-structured model for the UK, this predicts a maximal reduction of about 5% in ICU cases; although the precise numbers depend of the transmission from asymptomatic infection (relative to symptomatic cases) in children (x-axis) and the assumed reduction due to social-distances (coloured lines). My expectation is that the relative transmission rate from asymptomatic infections is less than 25%, which would suggest a very modest change from adopting school closures.

The results also show that the predicted impact on ICU is made far more complex by the additional transmission (to older individuals) that could result from school closures.
The Impact of Adding School Closures to Other Distancing Measures

By Nick Davies et al. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Abstract: This paper was prepared on 17 March 2020 and presented to a meeting of the Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE) on 18 March 2020. It was published on Friday 19 June 2020.

The research team at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) was asked to assess the potential additional impact of adding school closure either immediately or after the Easter break to the mixed package of interventions announced on 16 March 2020. They concluded that adding school closure to the existing package of interventions was likely to further reduce deaths by around 9%. Closing schools immediately or after Easter made little difference to the overall impact as case numbers were at that time believed to be low. Compensating behaviour, whereby some children are looked after by elderly individuals reduces the impact of the policy, but was thought to be highly unlikely to negate the overall beneficial impact of school closure.

Summary
• Adding school closure to the existing package of interventions is likely to further reduce deaths by around 9%.

• Closing schools now or after Easter makes little difference to the overall impact as case numbers are low at present.

• Compensating behaviour, whereby some children are looked after by elderly individuals reduces the impact of the policy, but is highly unlikely to negate the overall beneficial impact of school closure.
Aim
To assess the potential additional impact of adding school closure either immediately or after the Easter break to the mixed package of interventions announced on 16th March 2020.

Methods
We use the LSHTM age-structured stochastic transmission dynamic model. We used a county-level model (London boroughs are treated separately), and aggregated the data to the national level. Model results are for England. We assume that 50% of cases of any age are asymptomatic. Counties/boroughs, were seeded as before so that London boroughs were more likely to be seeded first and there was a roughly 30-35 day delay in peaks in an unmitigated epidemic. The seeding produced around 400-600 cases per day in London and similar numbers outside London on 16th March, which is roughly in line with the estimates from current nowcasting. Social distancing was put in place to capture those measures put in place on 16th March. This package of interventions are labelled “Intervention” in the figures and tables and they include:

1) Case-isolation, which reduces the transmission of clinical cases by 35%.

2) Cocooning of high risk individuals and those of the age of 70. We assume that 10% of adults under the age of 70 are high risk. Cocooning is assumed to result in a reduction in “Other” and “Work” contacts (as measured by POLYMOD) to 25% of their normal values

3) Home working: we assume reduces “Work” contacts by 30%, and “Travel” contacts by a similar amount.

4) A reduction in “Leisure” contacts by 75%. NOTE: the model is compartmental in nature and not able to simulate household quarantine, so may underestimate the impact of the package of measures revealed on the 16th March.

To this package of measures, school closure is added, either immediately (17th March 2020) or after the Easter holidays. School closure is assumed to continue until September.
5) In the base case, school closure is assumed to reduce “School” contacts to zero with no compensating changes in mixing. Note that “School” contacts as measured in POLYMOD also include college and university contacts.

6) As a sensitivity analysis, we look at a number of compensating strategies where children increase their contact with the elderly as a result of school closure. We assume that either 10, 20, or 50% of school-age children make one contact with one additional elderly person per weekday. These are labelled E10 / E20 / E50 respectively.

Results
The package of measures announced on March 16th is expected to reduce the peak height and size of the epidemic (see figure and table). However, substantial numbers of cases and deaths remain, and peak demand is likely to far exceed the capacity of the health service.

Adding school closure is expected to reduce this peak demand further (figure) and the total number of cases. Under base-case assumptions adding school closure to the package of interventions reduces deaths by a further 24,000 over the course of the epidemic (an additional reduction in deaths of about 9%). Closing schools now or after Easter makes little difference to the total size of the epidemic.

Increasing contact between children and the elderly as a result of school closure can reduce the impact of the policy on preventing additional deaths and hospitalised cases. However, the compensatory behaviour has to be very large for this to mitigate the effect of school closure entirely. For instance, even if 50% of children have an additional daily contact with an elderly individual, then the overall impact of school closure is still positive – reducing the median estimate of deaths from around 290,000 without school closure to 282,000 with school closure (table).

Even with school closure, the UK is likely to experience a large epidemic which will result in overwhelming demand for health services.
### Cases, thousands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Median (IQR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>24100 (21900-25500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>19900 (16100-22000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar sch. cl.)</td>
<td>18000 (16400-20000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (Easter sch. cl.)</td>
<td>17800 (16200-19900)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E10</td>
<td>17900 (16300-20000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E20</td>
<td>17900 (16300-20100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E50</td>
<td>18100 (16500-20300)</td>
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</table>

### Deaths, thousands

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Median (IQR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>290 (217-344)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar sch. cl.)</td>
<td>266 (222-317)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (Easter sch. cl.)</td>
<td>264 (220-317)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E10</td>
<td>268 (224-320)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E20</td>
<td>271 (228-324)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E50</td>
<td>282 (239-334)</td>
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### Non-ICU beds occupied, thousands

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</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>18100 (13900-21200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar sch. cl.)</td>
<td>16700 (14100-19600)</td>
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<td>Measures (Easter sch. cl.)</td>
<td>16600 (14000-19600)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E10</td>
<td>16700 (14200-19700)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E20</td>
<td>16900 (14400-19900)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures (17 Mar) / E50</td>
<td>17400 (14900-20400)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ICU beds occupied, thousands**

**Median (IQR)**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Base</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong></td>
<td><strong>2290 (1710-2710)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Measures (17 Mar) / E50</strong></td>
<td><strong>2220 (1880-2630)</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table:** Estimated number of cases, deaths and ICU/non-ICU hospital beds over the course of the epidemic under different mitigation strategies.
Social Mobility in Education: A Mixed Picture

By Matt Bazzant
National Foundation for Educational Research

Abstract: “Disadvantaged pupils face deep challenges, requiring a corresponding level of strategic effort to address them.” On 10 June 2020, the Social Mobility Commission launched a new report entitled Monitoring Social Mobility 2013 to 2020. This article, which was first published in the magazine Education Journal number 416 on 30 June 2020, looks at the report from an education policy lens and summarises its key findings.

Key words: Disadvantage, children, early years, attainment gap,

Social mobility' has long been the political buzzword, from Tony Blair’s ‘opportunity society’; Gordon Brown’s vision for everyone to ‘achieve their potential’; David Cameron’s ‘aspiration nation’; Theresa May’s ‘country that works for everyone’ to the current Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s ‘levelling-up’ agenda. But social mobility is far more than just a buzzword, and the fact that so many senior level politicians highlight it as a priority for our country demonstrates the importance of social mobility.

The Social Mobility Commission was originally set-up in 2010 as the Child Poverty Commission, becoming the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission in 2012 and the Social Mobility Commission in 2016. It is an advisory non-departmental public body of the Department for Education, which has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and to promote social mobility in England.

The Commission drew up recommendations for improving social mobility in 2013, and had found that social mobility had stagnated in 2018/19 in its ‘State of the Nation’ report. The Commission’s latest report, ‘Monitoring Social
Mobility’, audits Whitehall departments against some of the key recommendations it has made over the past seven years.

As the report states, “the responses paint a mixed picture”. There are 4.2 million children living in poverty, which is 600,000 more than in 2011/12, and this is predicted to worsen particularly following the Coronavirus crisis. The report uses the RAG scale (Red, Amber, Green) to audit departments on progress. Of the 52 questions asked, 31% were given a Red rating, suggesting that “little or no action has been taken by successive governments”. 46% were rated Amber, showing “some but insufficient progress”, and 23% were rated green, showing “strong progress or delivery”.

Looking specifically at early years, the report found that “young people from less affluent backgrounds make less progress in early life and are less likely to be school-ready”. It has called the gap between children from the most and least disadvantaged backgrounds “significant”, with 57% of pupils entitled to free school meals achieving a good level of development, compared to 74% of all other pupils.

The report acknowledges successes for the government, for example the DfE’s “clear and energetic commitment to early years”, the “significant steps [taken] to improve the quality of the home learning environment for those from disadvantaged backgrounds”, and the “good intent” shown to target communications at lower-income families. However, it also highlights key areas of concern, including the “absence of a consistent strategy” for early years, the lack of extension of eligibility for the 30-hour childcare offer, and the lack of a review “to establish the position of children’s centre in the national policy picture”.

In terms of education, the report found that only 51% of disadvantaged pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of primary school; this is compared with 71% of all other pupils. Moreover, only 25% of disadvantaged pupils get a good pass in English and Maths GCSE compared to 50% of all others, and at age 18 there is still a significant gap, which continues into students’ post-18 destinations.

The report again highlights where the government has been successful; for example making progress towards eliminating innumeracy and illiteracy (although only 71% of disadvantaged pupils pass the phonics screening check.
compared to 82% overall); reviewing and implementing recommended accountability measures (such as post-16 destination measures and the Ofsted outstanding exemption); making health and relationships education compulsory; and the development of a pupil premium toolkit. In terms of Further Education, the Commission welcomes the DfE’s actions to update the Discretionary Bursary Fund and a £400 million package for 16-19 education.

However, the report notes that despite the government’s ambition, ‘the situation on the ground is not getting better.’ The attainment gap remains wide and the report notes that the Sutton Trust has found that admissions system disadvantages thousands of already disadvantaged children (1).

The Commission believes that schools should have a more socio-economically diverse blend of pupils, but notes that the government has not committed itself to this goal. Concerns have also been raised around guidance for schools to know how to use Pupil Premium more effectively and different measures of disadvantage and vulnerability. Regarding Further Education, despite the funding package, spending per student will still be over 7% below 2010/11 levels in colleges and over 20% below in sixth forms. Additionally, there has been no action to implement a pupil premium for 16-19 students.

The Commission calls for a ‘coordinated strategy’ for early years and a plan which engages fully with local authorities and other early education providers. It states that ‘this should be backed with significant investment’. For education, the Commission states that school and college leaders must be given enough funding and support to implement evidence-based interventions, and calls on the government to put disadvantaged students at the heart of policy design in post-16 education.

The Government faces a major challenge now and over the next few years to improve social mobility. In 2017, the board of the Social Mobility Commission resigned after stating that there had been a lack of progress to improve social mobility, and Dame Martina Milburn, chairman since 2018, resigned last month stating that what the “secretariat needs is an executive chairman on at least three days per week or a different structure”.

The challenge to improve social mobility will be even greater in a post-Coronavirus world. To improve social mobility in the long-term, the Government will have to act on the Social
Mobility Commission’s recommendations to ensure a strategic, coordinated strategy across Whitehall.

Education can break the link between a child’s social background and their later outcomes, improving social mobility. This is why one of NFER’s primary objectives is to provide evidence on the factors affecting social mobility, educational outcomes, and later careers, in order to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to progress and succeed.

Foot note

Ofsted’s In-depth Study of Remote Education

From Ofsted

Abstract: Although remote education is helping to plug the learning gap during the COVID-19 pandemic, pupils’ engagement and motivation remain significant challenges for schools and parents.

Ofsted’s in-depth study on remote education from January 2021 finds that many schools are doing a good job of mitigating children’s learning loss. But keeping pupils motivated remains a challenge, despite schools having made strides in their remote learning offers.

Nearly half of parents who responded to Ofsted’s survey said that keeping their child focused on studying was a top concern, along with motivation and having enough contact with teachers. This was echoed by school leaders, with many working hard to increase pupils’ engagement and to find better ways for pupils and teachers to interact.

Recent government guidance has strengthened expectations around remote education. Today’s report explores the challenges schools, teachers and other providers face in meeting those expectations, and looks at the solutions they are finding to make sure children get a good education while away from the classroom. Ofsted also commissioned surveys of parents’ and teachers’ views about how their children were faring while learning remotely.

The report also finds:

• A large proportion of schools in England feel that they are doing well at mitigating children’s learning loss through remote education. Three fifths of teachers surveyed said they were confident they were providing a high-quality remote education when this was needed. However, schools are at different stages of development, and there is wide variability in the remote learning on offer.
• When developing remote education, most leaders said they focused on making sure pupils were learning what they needed to, rather than focusing on the technology. Several heads said that they expected teachers – with a little adaptation if needed – to deliver lessons as they would in person, modelling answers, questioning pupils and giving feedback as normal.

• Many school leaders do not see remote education as a barrier to curriculum delivery and believe learning opportunities, levels of pupil engagement and expectations should be the same regardless. Several leaders were ambitious with their curriculum, arguing that its breadth and depth should not be compromised or narrowed for remote education.

• Parents and schools are concerned about children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and their engagement with remote education. Nearly two thirds of parents of a child with SEND said they had been disengaged with remote learning, compared with almost 40% of parents of children without additional needs. While some special schools have adapted their remote education to support SEND pupils, such as supplying assisted reading technology, more work needs to be done to engage children with SEND.

• Leaders who participated in the research did not always regard remote provision as an entirely temporary measure. The report highlights the potential benefits of remote learning in the long term, such as providing teaching for snow days or extended periods of illness or absence, to minimise learning loss.

Key words: Special needs, parents, remote education, children, teachers, Ofsted, learning, schools, leaders.
ince March 2020, the need for and the expectations placed on remote education have changed considerably. From the middle of March and for most of the summer term, the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic led to school buildings in England being closed for most pupils. There was no requirement to provide remote education during this period, although some guidance was published.[1] Schools were open to all pupils from September 2020 but, given the need for class and year group bubbles and self-isolating pupils, the Department for Education established a continuity directive for mandatory remote education.[2] School buildings were again closed to most pupils in January 2021. From that point, remote education has been a requirement, so that pupils can continue with their learning.[3]

At the beginning of January, we published guidance on What is Working Well in Remote Education.[4] As England entered a third national lockdown, that short paper was intended to provide the sector with some immediate advice and reassurance on useful remote education approaches that had been distilled from our recent research activities.

Remote education matters. Until mass vaccination is achieved, local lockdowns, class and year group bubbles and individuals self-isolating are likely to remain part of daily life. This will have a continuing impact on schools’ capabilities in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum to all pupils. Schools are likely to continue to rely on remote solutions to provide coverage and mitigate against learning loss. Furthermore, evidence from our interim visits suggests that given the amount of time and resources that school leaders have placed into developing their remote solutions over the past 10 months, it is likely that schools will incorporate aspects of remote education into their teaching after the pandemic.[5]

Understanding what successful remote education is has been a priority for Ofsted during the pandemic. Education providers have of course been learning ‘on the job’, and many will now be well advanced in their own understanding. This paper sets out what we have learned through our research and visits and we hope providers find it helpful.

What is remote education?
At Ofsted, we have defined remote education as being more than just education delivered through digital methods. The term
‘digital education’ has developed as a term that means involving or relating to use of computer technology.[6] However, we also need to take non-digital elements into consideration. Some schools may still be at the early stages of incorporating digital technology into their remote solution or, as our evidence indicates, may have decided against using any form of digital education due to their local contexts and other barriers to delivery. The following definitions therefore apply throughout this paper:

- Remote education: any learning that happens outside of the classroom, with the teacher not present in the same location as the pupils. This includes both digital and non-digital remote solutions.
- Digital remote education: remote learning delivered through digital technologies, often known as online learning.
- Blended learning: a mix of face-to-face and remote methods. An example would be the ‘flipped classroom’, where main input happens remotely (for example through video), while practice and tutoring happens in class.
- Synchronous education: this is live, typically a live lesson but also reflects other live practices such as chat groups, tutorials and one-to-one discussions that also happen in a live online setting. Asynchronous education is when the teacher prepares the material and the pupil accesses it at a later date. Asynchronous can involve both digital (pre-recorded videos) and non-digital (textbooks) materials.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic
A lot of the research literature on remote or online education focuses on its use in higher education, which, before the pandemic, was the area of education in which remote education was most used in England. Therefore, a lot of this literature is less relevant as it covers success characteristics in online education environments that are typically associated with adult learners.[7] Students in higher education will tend to be better at self-regulating their own learning. They will also have a level of expertise in their studies that has implications for successful distance learning. Novice learners, on the other hand, are more likely to struggle without appropriate prior knowledge or clear facilitation being provided.

From the papers that do exist on schools’ use of remote education, the findings are not strong. Studies on online charter schools [8] in the United States have found that students tend
to perform worse on standardised assessments in these types of school compared with their peers who attend traditional settings.[9] Similar findings have also been found when comparing virtual learning environments to regular classes in US high schools.[10] The dominance of independent study in these online schools is likely to contribute to these outcomes, because students received less teacher contact time a week than in conventional schools.[11] Without clear scaffolding, for instance, online learning environments can be less effective for more novice learners.[12] School principals also reported that maintaining student engagement was their greatest challenge by far.[13] Pupils’ motivation to participate has also been identified as one of the main barriers to successful implementation of flipped learning models of teaching.[14] This is drawn out further in the evidence we have gathered on pupil engagement later in this report.

The body of research on digital technologies used within schools (not remotely) is more substantial. However, the quality of these studies varies considerably. Some feature narrow measures of impact.[15] Others emphasise the vision and innovation of the technical offer at the expense of adequately commenting on the quality of teaching and impact on learning.[16] For instance, a review of research on the use of tablet devices in schools found a lack of detailed explanations given to teachers about how or why using tablets in certain activities can improve learning.[17] In general, however, the evidence does give several helpful insights. For instance, digital technology can be useful when used to supplement teaching, particularly if the technology used and the desired learning outcome are closely aligned. Technological benefits have also been noted about methods that support teachers to give more effective feedback and through systems that can motivate students to practise more.[18]

Since the COVID-19 pandemic
More recent studies have focused on the degree of learning loss that pupils have encountered while learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. One paper, on the Dutch primary school system, highlights that pupils had made little or no progress while learning from home. This is despite a relatively short (8-week) lockdown and the country having a high degree of technological preparedness.[19] These results suggest much larger losses are likely in countries that are less
prepared for remote education. Closer to home, a report from the University of Southampton has calculated that in the first month of the lockdown, pupils in England suffered from a high degree of learning loss.[20] It is worth noting, however, that at the start of the first national lockdown in England, schools were not required to provide remote education. Both of these papers report that the loss was more pronounced for children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds than for other children. This builds on evidence of learning loss that we highlighted in our most recent annual report.[21]

From the picture described above, remote education would appear to be a poor replacement for normal classroom practice. However, even if not a full replacement for classroom teaching, it is a lot better than not having a remote education offer at all.

Although based on self-reported views, the findings from our YouGov survey show that three-fifths of the teachers responding were quite confident that they were providing a high-quality education through their school’s remote education solution when this was needed.[22] In addition, just over half were confident their solution was sustainable for the future (figure 1). On this basis, it is likely that a large proportion of schools in England providing a remote solution are doing well at mitigating the amount of learning loss that children experience.

It is important to understand the factors associated with the remote education solutions that confident teachers are delivering in more detail. We expect that a clearer picture of their activities will provide more helpful insight for other schools in developing quality remote solutions as well as aiding policy decision-making in the future. That is what the remainder of this report will aim to do.

Curriculum alignment in remote education
Some schools found it easier than others

The potential for learning loss at the beginning of the pandemic was exceptionally high for children in England. This is reflected in the responses on the YouGov questionnaire, where 49% of teachers thought that aligning remote education with their curriculum was a difficult process (figure 2). The evidence from leaders, however, suggests that this could be mitigated where schools already had a strong foundation of quality thinking around curriculum and pedagogy in place prior to the pandemic. In these cases, leaders spoke confidently about their curriculum
design, but also reported an easier transition into delivering education remotely.

**Figure 1: Teachers’ responses to the question ‘How confident are you that your remote education solution is of high quality?’ (in percentages)**

In other ways, the transition to remote education was more difficult. For instance, some schools decided to deliver their curriculum through a digital remote education solution. However, most teachers responding to the YouGov questionnaire said that the extent of digital investment in their school in the years before the pandemic had not been a priority previously (figure 3). Since the first national lockdown, however, this has drastically changed. The interviews with experts in the summer term also suggested that most of the barriers to remote education that schools following a digital pathway had encountered during the first national lockdown were due to a lack of investment in educational technology in the sector over the last 10 years. As one participant stated, ‘we were unprepared’.
Figure 2: Teachers’ responses to the question, ‘How easy or difficult has it been to align remote learning with the curriculum?’ (in percentages)

Figure 3: Teachers’ responses to the question ‘To what extent was investment in digital education prioritised?’ (in percentages)
Where the transition to remote education was easiest, it built upon existing provision. Some leaders displayed a degree of foresight before the March 2020 lockdown. These leaders anticipated that some form of remote education would be necessary and began preparations several weeks before official announcements were made. This provided them with time to lay the groundwork for their future solutions. In general, leaders in these schools had made early, effective decisions on the direction their remote systems would take, be that a focus on non-digital or on digital solutions. This included deciding on clear and simple protocols to provide remote education that everyone understands. A few leaders specified that attempting to integrate a number of different platforms and approaches into a single solution was problematic, as this tended to overload or confuse staff, pupils and parents.

Leaders from the focused interviews were keen to highlight that, despite their starting points and the advancements they have made over the last 10 months, they still consider that their remote strategy is maturing. They had not reached an end-point and there was still much more to do.

This was particularly the case in their thinking around aspects of teaching and assessment and how further adaption is required to enhance these components. Similarly, evidence from the interim visits showed that schools are at quite different stages of development to each other and that their remote learning offers vary widely.

Adapting a classroom curriculum to remote education

The YouGov questionnaire data highlights that only a small proportion of teachers (15%) reported that their school had managed to align their remote education solution completely to their intended curriculum (figure 4).

Several leaders from the focused interviews mentioned how effective remote education should conform to what we already know about human cognition and how people learn. They were clear that remote education, as the medium for teaching, does not change how pupils learn. Principles of curriculum design such as scaffolding, interleaving and retrieval practice are still therefore important within their solutions for aiding pupils to know more and remember more.

In addition, most of the leaders spoke about aligning their curriculum to mirror sequences of learning, with an emphasis on subject breadth and depth. Several leaders
argued that the breadth and depth of the curriculum should not be compromised or narrowed for remote education.

**Figure 4: Teachers’ responses to question, ‘To what extent would you say remote education has been aligned with the curriculum?’ (in percentages)**

Interestingly, unlike some at the interim visits, only one of the school leaders we spoke to from the focused interviews used the phrase ‘recovery curriculum’ to describe their curriculum offer. This suggests that there may be some conflict between the aims of minimising learning loss – which could lead to programmes that necessarily lower curriculum expectations – and ensuring that the rigour of a wide and deep curriculum is maintained.

Large adjustments to curriculum content in these schools was rare. Leaders stated that tweaking the curriculum was generally enough for re-purposing for a remote environment. One leader referred to this as ‘trimming the fat’. It gave staff opportunities to examine current schemes of work and adjust them to ensure that the focus was on the essential core knowledge required. They were not creating specific curriculums for remote education.

Leaders also regularly referred to the use of widely
available free online resources and materials to help deliver the curriculum remotely. However, in these cases, resources were selected to complement and enhance the existing schemes of work rather than used to deliver one-off lessons or activities. A few leaders mentioned that, where these resources did not fit their programmes of work, they had taken away some core principles of this solution and developed their own resources instead. This was particularly the case with staff developing their own pre-recorded lessons. In this way, external resources were adapted to fit into the existing sequencing of learning with the school’s curriculum.

There was, however, general agreement from these leaders that some subjects were more difficult to deliver remotely. Art, science, physical education and design and technology were commonly cited as problematic. This is because of their practical aspects, which develop pupils’ disciplinary knowledge in parts of these subjects. Despite difficulties, leaders explained how they managed to get around these issues to ensure that as full a curriculum offer as possible was still guaranteed for pupils. The following are a few examples of how these schools achieved this:

• In a few cases, the curriculum was re-arranged so that more theoretical content could be delivered during lockdown, with practical components reserved for the full return to classroom practice. However, staff were careful in how this was arranged so that it did not undermine an appropriate sequence of knowledge.

• Some of the schools used their internal resources and delivered art materials to pupils’ homes so that they could continue with the planned curriculum. For instance, one school had ensured that all pupils had access to a water-colouring pack and had prepared the curriculum to cover this artistic technique for the period of lockdown.

• Similarly, some schools provided their pupils with music equipment. Students were also able to upload small compositions onto the schools learning platform, so this could be assessed by teachers.

• For science, these schools had generally adapted practical lessons so that teachers modelled and demonstrated concepts and phenomena through live or pre-recorded lessons.

• A few leaders discussed how the curriculum in some subjects (particularly science and cooking) had been adapted to make use of common household materials to resource practical
elements of subjects.

• Leaders spoke about the importance of physical education. Some schools set a range of activities (using either resources that they had created or by sending links to external activities) for pupils to do at home, with family members as well.

• Language departments had realised the importance of pupils hearing how to pronounce dialogue in the target language to secure their knowledge. They uploaded audio files to the schools' online platform to help pupils. Primary schools were also applying similar methods for delivery of phonics lessons. Ultimately, leaders in these schools did not see remote education as a barrier to curriculum delivery. They thought the learning opportunities, level of engagement and expectations should be the same regardless, through a centralised, aligned curriculum.

Curriculum equity in blended learning approaches

A common message from school leaders in the focused interviews and the interim visits was how remote delivery had become trickier during the autumn term. This was due to the changing context. Remote education solutions were now subservient to curriculum delivery mostly happening in the classroom following the return of all pupils to school. Leaders frequently cited the workload burden that this placed on teachers. Two of the experts from the summer term interviews commented that delivering both classroom and remote education from September onwards would be very challenging for any teacher. This corroborates with the findings from the YouGov questionnaire, where over four-fifths of teachers specified that their workload had increased since the implementation of remote education.

Leaders from the focused interviews suggested this was less of a concern when sending class or year group bubbles home. In general, teachers would revert to their school's full remote education solution in these situations. However, in the case of self-isolating pupils, some leaders said that pupils would generally receive a different offer compared to their peers. This would typically consist of the same content and resources as the class lesson but with reduced contact time and feedback from the class teacher. Despite some of these schools using teaching assistants to provide individual support and putting in place assessment checks on the pupils' return to school, this method appears to have some implications for
A few of the leaders, however, did explain that their schools were using blended learning approaches to get around this issue. For them, removing the friction between the physical classroom and learning from home was the main priority. In these cases, a versatile online platform was central to the blended approach. The leader of one school explained that a platform like this allowed a teacher to be video-recorded and the lesson streamed (live or pre-recorded) to pupils situated in another classroom or at home. This ensured that pupils who were not in the physical classroom would have access not only to the full content of the lesson but also digital tools to facilitate real-time scaffolding and feedback. This included touch-screen technology for posing immediate questions to the teacher, the use of chat-boxes or the ‘raising hand’ feature of video meeting software.[23] Another leader explained how a blended approach was helping them to re-engage disaffected learners, particularly those who are anxious or overstimulated in a physical classroom setting, by allowing them to stream lessons from the school’s on-site inclusion centre.

Figure 5: Teachers’ responses to question, ‘Thinking about time spent on planning for and teaching remote learning, to what extent has your workload increased or decreased since remote education was implemented?’ (in percentages)
These leaders felt that it did not matter whether the experience uses synchronous or asynchronous (or mixed) approaches. What was important was that pupils could receive the same curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and level of socialisation to support their learning. However, this is not a quick fix solution. These schools had been using digital technology for numerous years before the pandemic. Leaders had already invested in the technical capacity and staff and pupil training required to reach the scale of implementation in this blended learning approach. What these examples do show is that curriculum equity can be managed for the long-term, once solutions become more mature.

**Pedagogy – keeping it simple**
Teacher responses to the YouGov questionnaire highlight that around a third lack confidence in teaching through a remote solution (figure 6). However, an effective solution does not need to be over-complicated. As the leaders we spoke to suggested, some level of adaptation to the remote medium is required, but this should not override principles of delivering effective teaching.

**Figure 6: Teacher responses to the question ‘How confident are you in teaching through remote methods effectively?’ (in percentages)**

![Teacher confidence chart]

Figures are rounded and may not add to 100.
Base: All teachers whose school offers remote learning (n=969)
Source: YouGov
All of the leaders reported that the importance of the quality of teaching is the same in remote education as it is for classroom-based provision. There need to be effective systems in place for scaffolding learning, demonstrating, responding to pupil questions and providing feedback. Most of them specified that the focus must remain on ensuring that pupils are learning rather than on the technology: ‘just because you’re doing live lessons doesn’t mean it’s good teaching’. Several participants commented that their teachers were expected to deliver lessons as they would in person, with pedagogical aspects such as modelling, questioning and feedback happening as a matter of course.

They were clear, however, that remote teaching does need a slightly different approach. This is because many dynamics of classroom teaching – such as pupil interactions, relationship building, providing feedback, delivery of practical components of a lesson and other experiences – are not directly replicable in a remote environment. Adaptations to teaching remotely that the leaders we spoke to had used included:

- a closer focus on verbal explanations and exposition, and presenting concepts in ‘bitesize’ segments, so that pupils could concentrate for short bursts of time and teachers could check pupils understood the learning points regularly
- shortening the length of lessons to aid pupils’ concentration spans and to reduce screen time when working at home
- using a variety of different ways of presenting information, although still making sure they are an appropriate fit to the task; for example, modelling on a whiteboard, using videos, teacher demonstrations of practical work to introduce and reinforce key concepts, using dual coding (combining words and visuals such as graphics and images) to present ideas and concepts
- ensuring time for pupils to practise what they have learned, for example through independent work or pupil discussion
- avoiding open-ended tasks that can potentially overwhelm pupils (just as in the classroom, most pupils will be novices in the content being taught) but providing opportunities to scaffold concepts

Leaders from the autumn discussions reported that a mix of live and pre-recorded lessons were generally used to deliver content. Some felt that interaction and engagement was greater during live lessons. They felt that this made checking pupils’
attendance, responding to their questions and giving immediate feedback easier. Several used a mix of synchronous and asynchronous approaches, which they suggested made better use of remote provision. For instance, this may involve the main content of the lesson being delivered live, but with independent work, activities or retrieval practice taking place offline (often to reduce screen-time) before returning to a group environment with pupils to discuss what they had learned.

Some leaders prioritised pre-recorded lessons above live sessions, stating teachers’ relative lack of confidence in front of the camera as a rationale for this. However, this was usually complemented with a mechanism for discussion with pupils at a later stage in order that teachers can check their conceptual understanding.

Most leaders thought that seeing and hearing their teacher and peers is important for pupils, particularly for their well-being and engagement with their work. One school reported that when pupils could see each other using cameras, they had more energy for lessons than when they were solely using audio. There was recognition from some leaders that their staff had needed to cross the line from ‘being scared of behaviour and safety issues’ to ‘we want to learn [how to do this]’. Some schools have used regular staff training to enhance teachers’ application of pedagogical principles in a remote lesson (for instance, where to stand, improving exposition or use of white boards) to increase their confidence in front of the camera. This has subsequently led to an increase in the number of live or pre-recorded lessons being delivered by teaching staff to their pupils.

**Checking what pupils are learning**

Learning is not fundamentally different when done remotely. Feedback and assessment are still as important as in the classroom. It can be harder to give immediate feedback to pupils remotely than in the classroom, but teachers have found some clever ways to do this, as outlined below.

**Feedback**

Quality feedback should allow pupils to know:
- where they currently are in terms of the topic, task or knowledge they are working on
- where they need to get to
- how they can close any gap between the two
Whether delivered remotely or in the physical classroom, quality feedback is dependent on the same mechanisms: the ability of a teacher to see pupils’ learning processes, understand their needs and to suggest ways for improvement in both daily activities as well as in summative assessments.

Similar to the interim visit evidence, most of the leaders from the focused interviews highlighted that this was still a developing area within their remote education solutions. One issue they highlighted was that picking up on pupil misconceptions in the learning process was not quite as immediate as in the classroom. For instance, they highlighted the fact that even in live lessons, the inability to ‘wander round and look at pupils’ faces in the classroom’ was a barrier to normal informal feedback approaches, as it is more difficult to check whether pupils are confused from their expressions and body language. They also frequently specified that feedback needs to be proportionate to the solution. One leader mentioned that ‘children aren’t daft – a thumbs up wears thin’!

However, several examples of how their schools were delivering regular feedback were picked up from the discussions:

• A few leaders specified that they were attempting to pre-empt the misconceptions pupils may encounter in their planning for remote lessons, particularly those that are pre-recorded.
• Others indicated that their solutions involved more direct communication with pupils to provide feedback. This included the use of chatroom discussions, 1-to-1 calls, interactive touchscreen questioning in live lessons and the use of adaptive learning software.
• In another example, digital exercise books were being used where immediate commenting, editing and feedback between students and teachers could be managed to communicate misconceptions and aid learning throughout the lesson.

However, several participants mentioned that the quality and richness of feedback are still more important than the ways in which feedback is delivered. For example, one school emphasised the importance of instant feedback in adapting individual pupils’ remote education activities. Leaders explained that pupils complete their work at home; the teacher discusses their work daily via phone and/or video calls; the work is then adapted for the next day if it was found to be too hard. In this case, the teacher highlighted the value of regular
communication, so the medium could be adapted to needs to improve learning. However, we should not underestimate the workload implications here.

**Assessment**

Assessment was one of the main areas that schools from the interim visits considered they needed to think more about. School leaders were often monitoring attendance (if digital) and ‘engagement’ to some degree, but often not really assessing learning – they identified this as the next priority. Similarly, there was general recognition from the focused interview participants that ‘the offer [had] developed and improved over time’. However, these leaders specified the importance of assessment to check pupils’ understanding and inform curriculum planning. For instance, one mentioned that ‘assessment needs to be clear: it’s the bridge between teaching and learning’. They understood that just having data to show that pupils are simply accessing resources (either through synchronous or asynchronous means) is not nearly enough to speak about pupils’ progress.

Despite limitations to observing real-time learning processes, some of the schools assessed pupils’ substantive knowledge on a daily basis. This was linked to lessons they had just completed or used for means of retrieval a few weeks later to check how much learning had been retained. Generally, pupils’ substantive knowledge was checked through low-stakes testing, such as online forms, quizzes and the use of chat boxes and polls in online platforms. Some spoke of using multiple choice questions that directed pupils to follow up when they provided an incorrect answer.

A few of the schools also had systems in place to regularly assess pupils’ progress through the curriculum. Leaders in these schools considered this to be essential for pupils’ learning. They felt that low-stakes quizzing was less useful for checking how pupils could place their knowledge into relevant contexts. This typically required pupils to submit more detailed written work or photographs of outputs from activities to an online platform. Teachers could then annotate and mark the work to provide more detailed assessments of pupils understanding and identify what pupils needed to work on further. Some leaders referred to summative assessments taking place remotely at previously defined assessment points, such as end-of-year exams. In these cases, they used a secure
digital exam platform, which alerts teachers to data on plagiarism and cheating. A couple of schools said that they used ‘gap assessment’ to complement rapid quizzes. For example, one primary school used dedicated time for pupils to ask questions in an open environment for extra support, alongside using interactive learning diaries, to keep teachers informed of whether pupils had the necessary understanding to move on to the next part of their learning.

A few leaders were particularly clear about the purpose of their assessment processes: that it was for feeding back into the curriculum and subsequent remote lesson planning. In these examples, leaders were insistent that the curriculum would not be rushed through if pupils had failed to grasp important concepts. They were also able to provide evidence of how they knew their assessment systems were working. For instance, in a couple of schools, staff were able to identify where pupils had not completed work independently but had received a lot of parent input. This allowed leaders to remind parents that this practice did not benefit their pupils’ learning.

Most of the leaders pointed out the need to respond more quickly to assessment information for remote education compared with in school, to maintain the focus and pace of learning remotely and to plan the next steps in pupils’ learning. There is a real danger that if assessment is left until pupils return to school, it could greatly contribute to their learning loss.

Engagement
Much emphasis has previously been placed on the lack of resources at home, especially digital technology, for pupils to fully access and participate in remote education. However, parents’ responses to the YouGov questionnaire highlight that their children’s motivation is of greater concern to them (figure 7). The data highlights that 11% of parents saw access to an appropriate device as a challenge, compared to 40% who responded their child’s focus on studying was a worry.

Interestingly, the parents’ responses align with the literature on the main weaknesses of online charter schools in the United States. Not only does pupil engagement feature as a concern, but also lack of contact with teachers (35%). These views also corroborate recent data from the Office of National Statistics. While 52% of parents suggested that a child in their household was struggling to continue their education while at home, only one in 10 of these parents identified that a lack of
devices was the reason for struggling. Instead, most of these parents (77%) identified a lack of motivation as the main concern around continuing with their education.[24] We will provide further insight into pupil participation, particularly on the scale of the problem, as part of our spring term monitoring visits.

Figure 7: Parents’ responses to the question ‘What have been the main challenges for your child when learning remotely from home?’ (in percentages)

From evaluations of their own remote provision, school leaders in the focused reviews also identified pupil motivation as a common weakness in their early remote solutions. Consequently, they had developed a range of tactics to combat and increase pupils’ curriculum engagement. Nearly all mentioned they were developing better systems for pupil and teacher interactions. Often, interactions were facilitated by tools embedded in each providers’ chosen digital learning platform. For example, several platforms offered the capacity for an
ongoing dialogue between the teacher and pupil on individual pieces of work.

Similarly, a few leaders specified that their schools had tried to create opportunities for student-to-student interaction to boost motivation and morale in their cohort. This was done through breakout rooms online, or through messaging boards/apps. A couple of schools mentioned that their nativity play was able to be streamed remotely. Leaders believed that this had created a sense of stability and community for the pupils involved. Another school arranged for children to sing to a local care home through a live online platform.

Some leaders felt that it was hard to ascertain the ‘true’ engagement of pupils. However, most of the leaders interviewed had also adopted some form of engagement monitoring. Again, this monitoring often took place through a feature in their digital platform. A number of schools had enhanced their approach. A commonly cited policy was to directly contact pupils’ parents when pupil motivation appeared to be lacking. A strength of the more effective platforms was that they not only provided a more accurate picture of engagement, for example by showing data on active hours or tracking pupils’ activity within the application, but they then linked this back to assessment that tracked pupils’ progression through the curriculum.

Remote education systems

Digital learning

Most of the leaders we spoke to who focused on a digital remote solution mentioned that access to digital devices was an initial barrier to remote education for some of their pupils. This was particularly the case for pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds. However, by the time we spoke to these leaders in the autumn term, most of the schools had overcome these issues. This was often because school leaders were highly concerned with the digital divide and went out of their way to ensure that all pupils could access their digital platform.

Most used parental questionnaires to identify where gaps in digital provision existed so they could provide targeted support to those who needed it. They were then pro-active in sourcing appropriate devices, typically computer laptops or similar, from the local community. Some schools mentioned that they had worked with local businesses, charities and other
external stakeholders to acquire devices. A couple of leaders mentioned they had used their COVID-19 catch-up premium funding to purchase digital equipment. Only a few leaders interviewed stated that access to digital provision was still an ongoing obstacle. These leaders were generally providing non-digital solutions for these pupils, such as slide-packs and worksheets, that matched the curriculum content other pupils were receiving.

Accessibility
The data from the interim visits highlighted the fact that, while there is an increasing use of live and recorded lessons in all types of schools, other barriers to the effective delivery of this remain. The views of leaders from the focused interviews emphasised this further. Leaders were clear that simply providing a device for all pupils is not necessarily a solution for access. The additional issues they raised, in some cases, affected decisions on the design of a remote solution, include the following:

• device appropriateness – mobile phones and tablets were generally considered a poorer tool for accessing and making use of content than a laptop
• poor quality or no internet connection – a few leaders had prioritised access to dongles or pre-loaded data cards for families that lacked access
• sharing with siblings – live lessons in a timetabled approach are more problematic in this scenario because pupils may not always have access to a device at times that align with a predetermined timetable
• availability of parental support – particularly for primary-aged children
• an appropriate environment for learning – the physical, social or emotional environment pupils find themselves in under remote conditions may not always be conducive to equality of access to remote provision.

While the leaders from the focused interviews generally felt that they had alleviated most of these concerns, leaders in some schools from the interim visits were still struggling with these issues.
Flexible solutions
A strong theme from each school’s remote education journey was that there was no one-size-fits-all approach. This is further confirmed by the YouGov questionnaire data, which identifies the various methods teachers are applying as part of their remote education solution (figure 8). Live lessons are a much more common feature in secondary school solutions, whereas primary school teachers indicated they were more frequently delivering content through physical resources and materials.

Figure 8: Teachers’ responses to the question ‘Which of the following remote education approaches does your school offer?’ (in percentages)

School leaders are clearly making different choices about how best to deliver remote education. Each school has needed to consider carefully the multiple contextual factors at play for the design they have ultimately decided to use. The barriers discussed in the previous section were also a strong part of the decision-making. Leaders approached this in a range of ways:
• Some offered a remote timetable that was the same as the usual school timetable. This usually consisted of most aspects
of engagement being delivered through live sessions. Proponents of this approach argued that it helped maintain consistency and routine for pupils and allowed for teachers to manage engagement well.

- Some offered a primarily digital-based asynchronous remote solution, which normally made use of pre-recorded lessons. Commonly cited rationales for this approach included reducing pressures on families and parents (for example, where parents may also be working from home and unable to support, or multiple children are sharing one device), as well as identifying and solving disengagement, where teachers feared students may not be able to stay engaged for the duration of a full-length live lesson. Asynchronous approaches tended to offer more flexibility for pupils/parents to take control of their learning at home. These schools had some live systems available to provide feedback for pupils, such as through tutorial sessions.

- A smaller number of schools offered primarily non-digital asynchronous remote solutions. In these cases, teachers delivered most of their teaching through paper-based ‘work packs’, worksheets, textbooks, and other physical resources, such as art supplies, which one school delivered to pupils’ homes. The schools offering this type of approach usually, however, had some form of digital provision for teacher-pupil interaction, feedback, assessment and tracking.

- A few schools had adopted a mixed delivery approach, which combined synchronous and asynchronous elements in line with their school’s specific context and needs.

**Non-digital remote education**

A few of the leaders from the focused interviews explained that they were not providing their pupils with a digital remote education offer but were instead providing learning resources in a more paper-based approach. In some cases, non-digital solutions were preferable to their digital alternatives, for example:

- for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who risk sensory overload when working at a screen
- for early years children, who rely on physical experiences as part of their development for which digital alternatives may not be adequate
- for schools that had difficulties in securing adequate digital access for their pupils.
As stated in our shorter guidance published earlier this month, a good textbook, slide-pack or worksheet can provide suitable remote education when used thoughtfully and in line with the school’s curriculum.\[25\]

The biggest concern with remote education delivery is not how it is delivered but the dialogic aspect of the teacher–pupil relationship, which is central to pupils’ progression. Non-digital solutions should still offer opportunities for regular pupil feedback and assessment. For instance, we heard a few examples, in the context of self-isolating pupils, of staff waiting until pupils returned to the classroom to assess learning loss. The danger is that this may well be too little too late.

Digital solutions have some obvious benefits for remote education. The potential for immediacy of feedback is an important one. Certain digital learning platforms appear to aid these types of teacher–pupil interaction. Some schools are already well on their way to developing robust feedback and assessment systems into their remote offer. Whether digital or non-digital remote education (or a mixture) is most suitable for a particular school is less important than making sure that the quality of delivery is not lost in the transition from in-school to remote provision.

Evaluating and reviewing
Most leaders reported that their current remote education solution had been established through a process of continuous development, adjustment and refinement. As one leader put it, ‘we learned along the way and adapted to changing circumstances’. Leaders, teachers and other decision-makers in schools showed remarkable agility and innovation as they incorporated different strands into their offers – described by some as a process of ‘trial and error’. As repeatedly reflected elsewhere across our evidence base, there was no uniform approach to schools’ ongoing adaptations. The common thread was that schools regularly monitored and evaluated their approaches to ensure consistency and effectiveness in this solution. That is, identifying what works and what does not. Leaders considered relevant research alongside close consultation with staff, pupils and parents and official guidance when deciding on next steps. Some of the approaches to adaptation were as follows:

• Regular ‘quality assurance’ of remote provisions: several schools described incorporating insights about what was
working and what was not into their ongoing professional
development and made changes accordingly. This was done at
a range of intervals – some schools did this half-terminly, others
fortnightly, weekly, even daily. The chosen approach depended
very much on each school’s specific context and needs.
• Some schools implemented various ‘models’ that
corresponded to different rates of attendance within their
cohorts. Schools variously described models for situations
where:
  • individual students within a class are isolating and the rest of
    the class is in school
  • a large ‘bubble’ or group within a year group are isolating
  • the whole year group is isolating
  • the teacher is isolating
• Some schools had attempted to create a unified experience
  across different contexts. Others had different defined
  strategies in place for each situation. In many cases, this move
  towards greater differentiation was an aspect of the growing
  maturity of a school’s remote education offer.
• It was often reported that schools had engaged with pupils’
  parents and carers to try to work out which aspects of their
  provision needed improvement. Although this was most
  commonly referred to in the context of access (that is, working
  out which students were affected by digital inequality) leaders
  also mentioned this engagement in other contexts, centred
  around improving remote provision more generally.

Overcoming common challenges
Leaders in the sector, subject experts, schools, parents and
teachers all told us of several common challenges they had
experienced in moving to remote education. This section of the
report outlines what those challenges have been and some of
the ways in which schools have overcome them.

Pupils in the early years and key stage 1
The primary school leaders we spoke to said that they had
additional challenges that were unique to their settings that
impacted on the design and delivery of their remote education
solutions. This was typically due to the age of their younger
pupils.

Some primary leaders felt that curriculum alignment had
been particularly difficult to achieve. For instance, one leader
referred to the content being covered, but often found that
pupils’ conceptual understanding was lacking. Due to the activity-based nature of many early primary experiences, remote education was a particular concern where resources for pupils were not commonly available in pupils’ homes. Several leaders also felt that pupils may experience learning loss in their social and communication development – a lack of socialisation with other children was a big concern for most of the primary leaders. However, schools in the focused interview sample had developed numerous ways to provide curriculum coverage:

• ‘stretch’ tasks, such as ‘deeper thinking’ challenges into remote resources, allowing students to challenge themselves and complete extra work
• online tools to facilitate some content delivery, particularly for English and mathematics
• phonics in particular seemed to translate well to a digital medium. Some schools used readily available phonics videos and software. Others recorded their own instructional videos and audio clips for pupils, which pupils could access from a website or digital learning platform
• physical resources delivered to pupils’ homes so that they could still access learning in practical-heavy subjects, such as art and science
• digitally-aided peer-to-peer interaction time so that pupils could maintain their social skills.

Many younger pupils have not yet developed reading skills to access written content and instruction. To overcome this, most of the leaders mentioned that teachers were using videos to some extent. One particularly innovative school also introduced a facility for children to upload their own videos as an alternative to providing written answers. However, live lessons were felt by some leaders to be a less appropriate delivery method for their youngest pupils. A common theme identified was that engaging younger pupils was a much more challenging task when done remotely. As one leader put it, ‘it’s impossible to get a bunch of reception children listening [in live lessons]… the novelty will quickly wear off’. A few leaders also explained that they had concerns about the amount of screen-time their youngest pupils were accessing and the impact this may have on their behaviour. These concerns led to most of the primary leaders in the sample using shorter pre-recorded video lessons instead. Leaders were nevertheless still ensuring that
any external resources used fitted appropriately with their intended programmes of work.

Every leader talked about how important parental involvement was in the remote education of their younger pupils, no matter whether this was being delivered synchronously or asynchronously. They felt that progression and development of younger pupils was heavily reliant on adult support. However, leaders highlighted several barriers that prevented pupils from getting the support that they required at home. For instance, some parents struggled with accessing content due to literacy issues or a lack of digital know-how. Employers who were ‘not sympathetic’ to children needing to be at home during the pandemic also made it difficult for parents to support their children.

Conversely, a few leaders reported that their assessment processes had identified parents who were engaging too heavily in their children’s learning. They were concerned over how much help pupils were getting from parents (as well as older siblings) in completing work and about the impact this was having on pupils’ knowledge. Similarly, one leader was worried that parents were ‘cherry picking’ their child’s best work for submission to teachers and were unwilling to show what they described as the ‘warts and all’ components needed to accurately check conceptual understanding.

Leaders we spoke to had applied some common approaches to help mitigate some of the concerns mentioned above:

• regular contact with home – this included through telephone calls, texts, emails, home visits, posts on blogs and through websites and social media; a few schools also made regular contact through the delivery of food and breakfast parcels
• providing pedagogical support, through guidance videos, learning supports, prompts and ‘cheat sheets’; some leaders also mentioned providing more formal training, which included to other family members (such as older siblings).
• collecting feedback regularly about what types of support would be most useful, as well as which aspects of remote education were working/not working
• tracking/monitoring parental engagement – one school set up IT accounts for parents and followed up with those not logging on regularly to see what additional support they required
• building confidence for parents – some schools mentioned
providing pastoral and emotional support for parents during lockdowns, including expressing regular encouragement that they were doing a great job of home schooling
• holding remote/virtual parent’s evenings
• translation tools for parents with English as a second language.

Most of the leaders mentioned that a central aim for them was to develop their pupils’ independence, so as to ease the burden on parents. This included providing training on how to access online platforms and to carry out more complicated tasks, such as photographing and uploading their work. A few leaders also said that, when planning lessons, they considered which activities would require the least parental supervision to help minimise the burden.

Adapting for pupils with SEND
Providing a remote education solution that is inclusive, one that pupils with SEND can meaningfully engage with and benefit from, is a concern for both parents and schools. The YouGov survey found that 59% of parents of a pupil with SEND said that their child has been disengaged with remote learning, compared with 39% of parents of children without additional needs. In terms of progression, schools were also concerned that learning gaps would be greater for pupils with SEND. Leaders are also worried that the negative social and emotional impact of the disruption of remote learning would be more severe for some of these pupils.

That said, the leaders from the 2 special schools interviewed had some specific examples of ways they had adapted their curriculum, teaching and support to the needs of their pupils with SEND. Both schools emphasised the fact that a central focus of their remote curriculum offer for pupils was to make it ‘tangible’ rather than digital. This is because some of their pupils with complex sensory needs found it difficult to engage exclusively with a screen.

Some leaders were also worried about pupils’ loss of routine and familiarity. They therefore developed mechanisms to mitigate this:
• Where pupils had a strong relationship with a teaching assistant, a learning support assistant or other adult, schools arranged for the adult to record voice messages for pupils, so that they could hear a familiar and friendly voice.
• Schools placed importance on a timetable that mirrored the in-person timetable to minimise changes in routines, which can be particularly disruptive to some pupils with SEND (although, for some, asynchronous approaches were more suitable).
• Where one-on-one reading support was not possible, schools sometimes used digital tools, such as assisted reading, to support pupils.
• Some pupils had additional resources or equipment delivered to their family home to ease the transition from school to home and to support their learning. For instance, sensory equipment was sent home for some pupils, so that they could learn in an appropriate environment. In other cases, schools provided equipment to help with muscle development for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Other schools delivered desks to pupils’ homes so that they had the appropriate means to study.
• Schools gave training to parents to improve their confidence with the specialist equipment their children needed.

However, the YouGov survey data suggests that there is more work to be done. Fewer than half (46%) of the teachers surveyed stated that their school offered additional remote learning arrangements for pupils with SEND.

The overall message was that the most effective solutions for pupils with SEND were bespoke, taking into account the specific needs and circumstances of each individual child. Greater focus and planning will be needed in the future to ensure that the worst effects of learning loss and the physical, social and emotional impacts of lockdown are mitigated for these pupils. Conversely, for some children, there have been benefits to remote education including being able to:
• work more at their own pace
• take breaks when they need rather than at prescribed times
• work in a space in which they experience less sensory overload

Post-pandemic, it would be beneficial to pupils with SEND if schools could consider how they might retain some of these benefits going forward.

Safeguarding
All schools are required, as they usually are, to be active partners in safeguarding children and to make referrals to the local authority where they have concerns about the safety of children at or outside their homes. Online or offline, effective
safeguarding requires a whole-school approach. Planning for remote education should include the school’s safeguarding team as part of the planning process. Pupils should be reminded of who they can contact within the school for help or support.

Most schools told us they are checking in regularly with pupils about their well-being. Other schools are going to great lengths to support children and families, for example by delivering food packages and other resources to their homes and checking in with parents as well as children. Schools recognise that when children struggle with the social and emotional impact of the pandemic, their remote learning is likely to be affected. Schools are working to mitigate that.

When it comes to remote education, considerations around protecting the safety of students, particularly in online environments, posed a central challenge since March 2020. Many schools we spoke to stated safeguarding as a key consideration when making decisions about which platforms and digital tools to use for their remote offers. In particular, there were concerns about cameras. Some schools opted to disable cameras in the interests of safety. Others felt face-to-face contact online was fundamental to the well-being of staff and pupils and so made a risk-assessed decision to keep them on based on this. A number of schools made reference to having additional staff present for live lessons. Other safeguarding considerations mentioned less frequently in the interview sample were around data protection (one school leader worried about the sharing of pupil data with ‘big tech’ companies) and keeping screen time at a healthy level. It is, of course, important that schools consider their own contexts and their own pupils when making decisions.

The April 2020 COVID Addendum to the Guidance for Safer Working Practice outlines for leaders and staff what they should consider when assessing the risks around their remote learning solutions.[26] We have summarised their key points below:

Senior leaders should:
• review and amend their online safety and acceptable use policies to reflect the current situation
• ensure that all relevant staff have been briefed and understand the policies and the standards of conduct expected of them
• have clearly defined operating times for virtual learning
consider the impact that virtual learning may have on children and their parents/carers/siblings
• carefully consider the context of their own setting and appropriate use of live lessons; consider whether other options might be more suitable in some contexts – for example, using audio only, pre-recorded lessons or existing online resources
• be aware of the virtual learning timetable and ensure that they have a capacity to drop in, unscheduled, on a range of lessons
• take into account any advice published by the Department for Education, local authority, multi-academy trust or their online safety/monitoring software provider.

Staff should:
• adhere to their establishment’s policy
• be fully dressed
• ensure that a senior member of staff is aware that the live lesson/meeting is taking place and for what purpose
• only record a lesson or online meeting with a pupil where this has been agreed with the headteacher or other senior staff, and the pupil and their parent/carer have given explicit written consent to do so
Adults should not:
• contact pupils outside the operating times defined by senior leaders
• take or record images of pupils for their personal use
• record virtual lessons or meetings using personal equipment (unless agreed and risk assessed by senior staff)
• engage online while children are in a state of undress or semi-undress.

Leaders and staff should familiarise themselves with the full document (this sample is taken from section 24a).
In some cases, staff may need to speak to children one-on-one, for example teaching assistants might be providing extra support to children with SEND. Where this is the case, staff should ensure that parents are aware, and invited to, any one-to-one interactions with pupils and that those interactions are necessary (for example, for teaching assistants supporting SEND children). Senior staff should also be aware and have the option to join. Staff should also be clear about expectations around behaviour, for example, a ‘classroom standard’ of behaviour is expected from all participants.
For further advice and information, schools should familiarise themselves with guidance from the Department for Education. [27]

**Teacher well-being**

Workload increase was a real concern for many at the outset of the pandemic and is an ongoing, if not increasing, challenge. In particular, mixed delivery situations were seen as posing a threat to staff well-being. It was reported a number of times that staff were required to deliver content to students both in and outside of the classroom simultaneously. Without an appropriate blended learning model, this was regarded as a particularly challenging situation. In addition, creating videos, live lessons and planning all take time, especially when needed at short notice. Leaders were also conscious of the social and emotional impacts of the pandemic, and of staff getting to grips with delivering content digitally where they perhaps lacked the skills or confidence to do so.

Encouragingly, many school leaders appeared to be making decisions through (at least in part) the lens of staff well-being. Every leader in our focused interview sample mentioned their desire to preserve staff well-being. Some offered some practical examples of how they did so:

- regular staff meetings, with consideration given to not keeping staff tied up in too many meetings – a few leaders mentioned how they were now doing staff meetings online
- making use of existing external resources, rather than creating everything from scratch; the caveat here is that some time needs to be spent on aligning those resources with the subject or school curriculum
- regular continual professional development (CPD), as well as readily available CPD and other support materials – often these were accessible digitally, so could be drawn on at any time staff wished
- increased time allocated for planning and reflection; some leaders mentioned that their staff were planning remote lessons as a team
- when making decisions about digital learning platforms/software/other resources, taking into account which solutions would be most conducive to a manageable staff workload
- creating clear and widely accessible (to both staff and parents) guidance documents to ease both parental and staff
anxiety about ‘what is actually happening’

That said, a few leaders mentioned that they felt ‘it was important not to overburden staff’ but did not offer concrete instances of how and when they had done this. This may suggest that staff well-being needs to take a more central role in future decision-making in some settings. We saw from the interim visit evidence that leaders and decision-makers themselves have reported low levels of well-being and high workloads. This needs to be taken into account. Some schools have also been more impacted by COVID than others, depending on areas where outbreaks were more or less prevalent in autumn. This means that some schools were able to plan while others were dealing with regular COVID-19 cases among pupils or staff.

Training on remote education resources or tools
One of the challenges of remote education is the need for teachers to be trained in both the use of the technology solution planned and adapting the curriculum and their teaching approaches for a remote education environment. Schools also need to provide information for pupils and parents on using the technology or learning resources available. The evidence from the interim visits indicated that training for remote education has evolved: increasingly, schools are expanding their training to how the curriculum should be delivered remotely. However, in a small number of schools, staff had received no formal training in relation to remote education.

We also surveyed teachers about the extent of training or provision of learning resources for different groups and received mixed results.

Leaders who have overcome more of the barriers associated with remotMany of the leaders from the focused interviews discussed training regarding improving teacher and/or pupils’ skills in accessing digital platforms and remote learning software. However, as with the interim visit findings, not all had moved beyond this scope. Several leaders mentioned that teaching and learning approaches were widely discussed, but formal training in specific pedagogy for remote education had not always been well developed. For instance, a few leaders noted that virtual classes should mirror live classroom activities, so no specific pedagogical training for the medium had taken place. Education have broken down the elements of learning to teach remotely, helping children learn remotely and
communicating effectively with parents who support the whole process.

Figure 9: Teacher responses to the question ‘Has your school offered training or learning resources on how to use remote education tools to any of the following?’ (percentages that said ‘yes’)

However, most of the leaders from the focused interviews had moved beyond this starting point. They explained that while ‘training staff to use technology came first, pedagogy came later’. They typically argued that a ‘different pedagogy’ is needed to enable better use of language, explanations and active participation from pupils. A few schools had developed resources, such as a ‘pedagogical practice newsletter’, to share good practice across their departments or their multi-academy trust’s subject communities. Several said that they had developed their training on pedagogical
approaches from freely external video lessons and materials available from the Education Endowment Foundation.[28]

Most of the leaders mentioned that they had found ways to engage parents, as well as children, in using their remote education solution. This was particularly the case with the primary school leaders spoken to. Many had created surveys, videos and newsletters to help communicate the design of their remote solution and expectations for pupils to parents. As an added benefit, leaders suggested that this improved relationships with parents and built trust.

Future benefits to remote education
Leaders from both the focused reviews and interim visits did not always regard remote provision as an entirely inferior or temporary measure but expressed a desire to retain some aspects of their remote education provision when their schools return to ‘normal’ modes of teaching. Having spent time and resource over the last 10 months developing new systems, they were able to identify some positive benefits that may aid pupils learning in the future. These included:

• video lessons from subject experts to provide teacher cover (this has some potential workload benefits)
• video lessons where there are subject specific teacher recruitment and retention issues
• supporting anxious or excluded students off site or in other on-site learning areas
• availability of pre-recorded lessons for revision purposes or where pupils miss lessons due to illness
• provision of teaching and learning during snow days, extended periods of pupil illness or absence, holidays, interventions for over and underachievement and potentially INSET days, to minimise learning loss (eg ‘We have lost snow days forever! May upset students.’ and ‘Huge opportunity to make sure that not a single day of a child’s education is lost to events beyond their control.’)
• improvements to homework delivery
• giving pupils the means to manage aspects of their own learning. Several primary school leaders in the interview sample felt their pupils had gained independence from their remote learning experiences. Many referred to engaging in discussions around metacognition with their learners – this may have positive benefits for these pupils’ future understanding of their educational journey.
For some pupils with SEND, there were some notable positive opportunities posed by remote learning. Different platforms could be used to cater for different needs and overcome issues that may have previously excluded pupils from parts or all of certain lessons. Pupils with sensory overload issues, for example, could be taught remotely for a portion of a lesson and then reintroduced to the main class later on when the environment had ‘calmed down’.

Many schools also mentioned additional future-oriented benefits that fell outside of the area of pupil learning but still offered exciting prospects for an improvement to schools’ overall offer. These included:

- up-skilling (both of staff and pupils) – teachers gaining digital proficiency had led to the potential for an improved learning experience in the future
- the social aspect of remote provisions, particularly in the context of improving communication/relationships with parents, carers and families of pupils. Schools generally all expressed that relationships with parents had been bolstered and parents felt they were more involved in their child’s learning. Many schools stated that they felt remote learning had created or strengthened the ‘community’ or ‘team-like’ nature of their schools’ environment
- safeguarding: some schools said that it was easier to safeguard vulnerable children because they have found it easier to communicate with them more regularly.

**Conclusion**

Our evidence shows that current remote education solutions across schools vary considerably in design. There does not appear to be a perfect one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, school leaders are taking into account their specific local contexts to design flexible remote solutions for pupils, staff and parents.

From speaking to those leaders with maturing systems in place, we can infer the following general overview:

- The curriculum should not be seen as a separate entity. Remote education is just another way for the planned curriculum to be delivered. Therefore, principles of good curriculum design still apply in maintaining the rigour of a wide and deep curriculum.
- Pupils still learn in the same way, so principles of good pedagogy, such as the importance of practice, retrieval and feedback, need to be developed in any remote system.
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- Assessment is an area of development, but the evidence indicates that pupil engagement is not the same as learning. Pupils’ conceptual understanding still needs regular assessment to ensure that they progress through the curriculum.
- While elements of remote education have proved useful, poorer pupil engagement, access to appropriate resources, staff well-being and the pressure remote education places on families and parents can remain real barriers to pupils’ learning and development.

Clearly, the message from the evidence is not that we should not be doing remote education. It is an imperfect but necessary substitute in mitigating against learning loss where classroom teaching is not possible. Pupils are still learning more than they would without any school support.

Within this report there are some clear examples of how school leaders are developing their systems and providing solutions for the barriers that exist. We hope this provides helpful advice for other leaders and staff with the future refinement of their remote education solutions.

Annex: Methods
Ofsted carried out several strands of research work during the summer and autumn terms 2020. We had 3 main research questions:
1. How have schools adapted their teaching in response to COVID-19 (coronavirus)?
2. What barriers exist to creating a remote education solution that provides children with the same quality of education they would receive in the classroom?
3. What does a good quality remote education look like, in proportion to the barriers outlined above?

We carried out this work to inform and improve our own knowledge and understanding of remote education. We also wanted to use our resources to provide national insights to the education sector to help schools plan and review the quality of their own remote education solutions.

We gathered the following forms of evidence between summer and the end of 2020.
Rapid review of the literature on digital remote education.

First, we carried out a review of current research and literature to determine some core principles of quality digital remote education. However, the existing evidence base for remote digital education in schools was slim and what we found was similar to what the Education Endowment Foundation had found previously.[29] Where relevant, we have included references to other research in this paper.

**Semi-structured and structured interviews with professionals**

**Semi-structured interviews with 4 leading experts**

The rapid review of literature was supported by interviews with 4 experts who were particularly invested in teaching and learning, and digital education. Our senior research lead on this project carried out these interviews in July 2020. Participants were asked about:

- what they considered to be the main features of high-quality digital remote education
- how digital technology could support teaching during the pandemic
- what the barriers were that existed in delivering this.

Their evidence gave us some working assumptions that we used to help design the questions in the interim visits, focused interviews and questionnaire work that followed.

**Semi-structured interviews with school leaders during interim visits**

The interim visits we made during the autumn term 2020 included questions for leaders on the remote education that each school was providing. In total, we analysed the evidence from 798 of these visits.[30]

**Semi-structured interviews with remote education leads in schools**

We also selected a purposive sample of 25 schools in which we carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews with the main decision-makers (referred to as ‘leaders’ in the body of the report) on remote education in each school. Because our purpose was to define quality aspects of remote provision, we selected participant schools on the following bases:
that they already had a developed approach to curriculum development and delivery in place
available information suggested that their remote education solution was sufficiently mature.

The sample consisted of:

- 11 primary schools
- 11 secondary schools
- 2 special schools
- 1 pupil referral unit

Eight of these had received an interim visit earlier in the autumn term. We designed these interviews replicating aspects of a methodology we previously applied in phase 2 of our curriculum research.[31]

The interview questions were designed by the senior research lead and two lead Her Majesty’s Inspector (HMI). Twenty-six Ofsted inspectors carried out the interviews. Each interview was carried out online by 2 Ofsted inspectors. They shared the responsibility of asking questions and taking notes to ensure the evidence collected was sufficiently detailed. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Structured interviews with teachers, commissioned through YouGov
We commissioned YouGov to carry out in-depth interviews with 20 of the teachers who responded to a questionnaire (see below). These interviews explored how remote learning was being developed and implemented in these teachers’ schools. YouGov also asked about the perceived impact of remote education on children’s learning. We selected teachers who opted into this follow-up study according to a mix of school type, school phase, location and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals on roll.

Teacher and parent questionnaires
We commissioned YouGov to carry out separate teacher and parent questionnaires. The objective of this work was to give us supporting evidence to the interim visit data collected by inspectors. We particularly needed this because the interim visit methodology meant we were less able to engage with teachers and were not able to engage with parents at all. The quantitative data from this work also gave us evidence on the
strengths and weaknesses of remote education being delivered nationally.

For both questionnaires, we developed the content of an online survey with YouGov. The survey was open for 2 weeks in late November and early December. In total, 1,003 teachers and 2,020 parents responded. The figures used in this report have been weighted and are representative of:

• all parents in England by family type, age of family reference person, social grade and region
• all teachers by school type, teaching level, region, gender and age.

Focus groups

With our own inspectors

Our regional director for London held several meetings with groups of inspectors, including Senior HMI, across all our regions. These were for inspectors to share information and practice that they had discussed with school leaders during the interim visits. They also shared their observation and evaluation of the remote education practice that school leaders had told them about.

With 7 digital leaders from EdTech demonstrator schools

We also carried out an online focus group in July 2020 with 7 digital leaders from EdTech demonstrator schools to help to decide some core principles of quality digital remote education. The schools involved were invited to participate through contacts at the Edtech Demonstrator Programme. The questions were similar to the ones we asked in the interviews with the 4 experts. We also used the data to support the design of the activities that followed in the autumn term 2020.

Foot notes


8. These are institutions where education is carried out online without a bricks-and-mortar presence and where students are enrolled full time.


15. K Turvey and N Pachler, ‘Design principles for fostering


22. During the time of the data collection, remote education was needed at different times for different pupils who were self-isolating or sent home from school as part of a bubble.

23. This solution, however, does have an impact on design appropriateness. Pupils would need devices that include touchscreen functionality.


25. *What’s Working Well in Remote Education*, Ofsted,
January 2021.


30. You can read the main findings in *Ofsted COVID-19 Series*, Ofsted, October 2020.


https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/remote-education-research/remote-education-research
Select Committee Reports

We continue our series of reviews of all parliamentary select committee reports on education, which we started in volume 25 beginning with January 2018. In this issue we review all reports published between October 2019 and the end of December 2020. Our next issue will cover reports published this year.


Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

In 2014, Parliament had legislated with the intention of transforming the educational experiences of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The House of Commons Education Select Committee concluded that while the reforms had been ambitious, as the Children and Families Bill sought to place young people at the heart of the system, the ambition remained to be realised.

The report stressed that let down by failures of implementation, the 2014 reforms had resulted in confusion and at times unlawful practice, bureaucratic nightmares, buck-passing and a lack of accountability, strained resources and adversarial experience, which had “dashed the hopes of many”. The Committee argued that although reforms had been the right ones, their implementation had been badly hampered by poor administration and a challenging funding environment in which local authorities and schools had lacked the ability to make transformative change. It added that while the Government had recently taken initial steps to rectify the latter of the two challenges, there was much left to be done.

The report warned that there was too much tension between the child’s needs and the provision available, and the significant funding shortfall was a “serious contributory factor” to the failure on the part of all involved to deliver on the SEND reforms and meet children’s needs. The Committee concluded that without a culture change, within schools and local authorities and the Government, any additional money would be wasted.

It pointed out that the findings had shown a general lack of accountability within the system and the Committee did not believe that the current approach to accountability was sufficient. The absence of a rigorous inspection regime at the
beginning had set the tone of a hands-off approach, which had been perpetuated by the fact that those required, or enabled, to “police” the system had been limited in part by an apparent unwillingness to grapple with unlawful practice, while others had been limited by the narrowness of their remit.

The report therefore called for a more rigorous inspection framework with clear consequences for failure. The Committee also called for a greater focus on SEND in school inspections as children who received SEN Support were being let down by schools that were failing to meet their needs.

The Committee recommended that:

- Parents should be able to report directly to central Government when local authorities failed to follow processes that had been set out in statute and guidance.
- The Department should create a mechanism specifically for parents and carers of children with SEND, beyond what currently existed.

The report argued that the distance between young people’s experience, their families’ struggles and ministers’ desks was too far and parents and carers had to wade through “a treacle of bureaucracy, full of conflict, missed appointments and despair”.

The Committee said it wanted to see a neutral role introduced to arrange meetings, co-ordinate paperwork and be a source of impartial advice to parents, which would help to reduce conflict in the system and remove much of the responsibility that seemed to fall on parents’ shoulders.

The report warned that while many local authorities had been struggling with the reforms, and in some cases the situation had led to unlawful practice, they had also been struggling against the tide of unintended consequences of policy decisions. Although it had passed no judgement on the merits of the Department’s free school policy, the Committee said that current restrictions on a local authority’s ability to create new specialist settings did nothing to improve the educational experiences of young people with SEND and it led to more pupils entering the independent sector at significant cost to the taxpayer.

The report pointed out that while there were some opportunities for young people with SEND, such as supported internships and apprenticeships, such opportunities were limited, and there was not sufficient support, or sufficient
emphasis on enabling them to achieve their hopes and dreams. The Committee called on the Government to establish a ministerial-led cross-departmental working group to develop more employment and training opportunities for post-16 young people.

The Committee had heard that many of the eagerly anticipated initiatives were not living up to their ambition and name and it added that while the role of health providers was pivotal, unsurprisingly, the meshing of two systems had not worked. The report argued that unless health and social care were "at the table", the Education, Health and Care Plan would be no more than a Statement by another name. The Committee also wanted to see greater joint working between the health and education sectors, beginning with the development of a joint outcomes framework to measure how the health aspects of support for children and young people with SEND were being delivered locally.

But the report stressed that ultimate responsibility for such monitoring should sit with government, not an inspectorate. The Committee said that as it had seen "serious gaps in therapy provision", professionals must be trained and supported so that they would be able to support all pupils.
Investigation into UTCs

In December 2016, the National Audit Office (NAO) had reported that the then Education Funding Agency had assessed 22 of 47 University Technology Colleges (UTCs), which are a type of free school catering for 14-19 year-olds, as at risk due to financial concerns, which had been partly caused by the fact that UTCs had fewer students than predicted. In January 2018, the NAO had reported again that UTCs had struggled to attract enough students. In light of Parliamentary interest in UTCs, the latest NAO investigation sets out the facts about the UTC programme.

The NAO had conducted its fieldwork between June and September 2019, but the investigation did not assess the value for money of the UTC programme. The 48 UTCs that had been open in January 2019, when the NAO had last collected data, were operating at 45% of capacity on average, which the report pointed out, had implications for their financial viability as the core funding that UTCs and other schools received was mainly based on student numbers. The 48 UTCs had 13,572 students although their maximum capacity had been 29,934. While occupancy rates at individual UTCs ranged from 10% to 101%, the 10 UTCs that had closed had been around a quarter full on average in the two years before closure.

UTCs tended to recruit students to start GCSE and A-level and equivalent courses, but they had struggled to attract students at age 14, partly because of the normal period of secondary education which starts at 11. UTC’s revenue deficits had grown and accounted for nearly 10% of the total cumulative revenue deficits reported by all academy trusts in 2017/18.

The total cumulative revenue deficits reported by UTCs had grown each year between 2014/15 and 2016/17, but they had fallen in 2017/18 following the closure of four UTCs in single-academy trusts that had all been in deficit. Overall the total cumulative deficits had risen from £3.5 million in 2014/15
to £7.7 million in 2017/18, when 14 of the 32 UTC academy trusts had reported cumulative revenue deficits. The total of £7.7 million represented 9.9% of the total aggregate cumulative revenue deficit of £78 million for the 195 academy trusts that had reported deficits in 2017/18.

In July 2019, the Education and Skills Funding Agency had reported “significant concerns” about the finances of 13 UTCs. Each month, the ESFA compiles a “national concerns report” to highlight academy trusts of most concern, including UTCs. In July 2019, 13 UTCs in single-academy trusts had featured on the national concerns report, 12 because of their financial position and one because of compliance issues.

The ESFA formally intervened in eight UTCs, of which two had subsequently closed. Where it had significant concerns, the ESFA could take formal action by issuing the academy trust with a public warning, known as a “financial notice to improve”. The ESFA issued financial notices to improve to eight UTCs and in October 2019, four of the notices were still in place; two academy trusts had addressed the issues of concern and the ESFA had lifted the notices; and two UTCs had closed.

While the Department for Education monitors whether students from UTCs that had closed moved to other schools or colleges, it had not retained evidence of where students had been placed. The Department told the NAO that it worked with the local authority and the academy trust concerned to find places and it monitored progress in the months before closure. To demonstrate its approach, the Department had shared the information it had used to monitor the destinations of students from Wigan UTC, which closed in August 2019, with the NAO. While the Department had not retained records of where students from closed UTCs had been placed, it told the NAO that alternative places had been found for students who needed them.

The Department had spent £792 million on the UTC programme from 2010-11 to 2018-19, the vast majority in capital grants. The Department provides capital and revenue funding for new free schools, including UTCs, and in addition to the per-pupil funding that UTCs and other schools received, the Department's spending on UTCs included:

- £680 million (86% of total spending) in capital grants for land, buildings and equipment, including up to £600,000 per UTC for
specialist equipment;

- £62 million (8%) in revenue grants before UTCs opened, for example to cover the costs of project management and marketing the new school, and after opening to support UTCs as they built towards capacity;

- £28 million (4%) in transitional revenue funding aimed at improving the financial position of UTCs, for example by reducing their debts;

- £8.8 million (1%) to cover UTC deficits– the Department expects UTCs to repay half of the funding over time;

- £9.0 million (1%) on closing UTCs, including to cover the costs of writing off debts and staff redundancies; and

- £4.5 million (0.6%) on measures to help UTCs to improve.

UTCs pay an annual licence fee to the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, a charity which owns the UTC brand, issues licences to schools wishing to operate as UTCs, checks whether its licence requirements are being met and supports UTCs, for example by facilitating the sharing of good practice.

Each UTC pays a fee annually to use the UTC brand and logo and for services from the Trust. The fee increased from £5,500 to £10,000 in 2019/20. The Department also paid £893,000 to the Trust between 2012/13 and 2017/18 to support sponsors planning to open new UTCs.

In terms of educational performance, compared to other secondary schools, a higher proportion of students from UTCs progressed into sustained apprenticeships and a lower proportion into education. The Department's aim is for UTCs to provide progression routes into higher education and employment and it therefore considers that student destinations are important performance measures. The Department's most recent data from 2016/17 showed the following for UTCs, compared with state-funded mainstream schools and colleges:

- After GCSEs or equivalent, a higher proportion of UTC students progressed into sustained apprenticeship (9%) and employment (4%) destinations, compared with the national average (5% and 3% respectively). Conversely, a lower
proportion progressed to sustained education destinations.

- After A-levels or equivalent, 21% of UTC students moved to a sustained apprenticeship, higher than the national average of 6% (including 16% of UTC students who moved to advanced, higher and degree-level apprenticeships, compared with the national average of 3%); 20% moved to sustained employment, compared with the national average of 22%; and 38% went on to higher education, below the national average of 50%.

In August 2019, Ofsted had rated 52% of UTCs as good or outstanding, compared with 76% of all secondary schools. Of the 44 open UTCs that Ofsted had inspected in August 2019, it had rated two as outstanding, 21 as good, 14 as requires improvement and seven as inadequate. In total, 4,863 students were attending the UTCs rated as inadequate or requires improvement. In August 2018, Ofsted had rated 42% of UTCs as good or outstanding. But Ofsted has changed its approach to UTCs in its new inspection framework that inspectors had been using since September 2019, which meant that inspectors would pay attention to measures such as students' destinations when they leave UTCs as well as to national performance data. UTCs have performed less well than other secondary schools against key measures of performance, but the Department argued that not all its metrics were appropriate for UTCs because of UTCs' technical focus and age range. In the main, the Department does not set target levels of performance for schools and the focus is on how well they perform relative to others.

In 2017/18, 28% of students in UTCs had achieved a grade 5 or above in maths and English GCSE, compared with 44% of students in all state-funded mainstream schools. Similarly, at A-level and equivalent qualifications, UTC students' attainment had been lower than that of students at other types of education provider. But the report pointed out that the lower educational outcomes that UTCs had achieved may be partly explained by their student intakes, although it would be difficult to find out.

The Department considers that, because of UTCs' focus on technical education and the fact that their students typically joined at age 14, two of its main performance measures (the proportion of students entered in English Baccalaureate courses and “Progress 8”) were not the most appropriate for
UTCs, although it continues to report performance data. The report noted that while the Department had not set alternative exam-based measures of educational performance for UTCs, given UTCs' focus on technical education and skills, it considered student destinations a good indicator of performance. In September 2017, the Department had begun a three-year improvement programme:

- An important part of the Department's approach had been to encourage UTCs to join multi-academy trusts, which it considered were well placed to support UTCs to improve. During the NAO investigation, 19 UTCs had been part of multi-academy trusts and the Department had expected a further 10 to transfer in 2019/20. The report pointed out that the conditions that the Department attached to transitional revenue funding may include requiring UTCs to join multi-academy trusts.

- The Department had also been open to UTCs applying to align their age range more closely with other secondary schools by taking students who were younger than 14, if there was a need for the additional places in the area. It considered that such a move would make it easier for UTCs to attract students and thereby improve their financial viability. At the time the NAO investigation, one UTC had been taking pupils from age 11 and the Department had agreed that two further schools could expand in the same way from 2020/21; nine UTCs had been recruiting at age 13.

The Baker Dearing Educational Trust had been concerned that the developments could dilute the UTC brand, but it had since relaxed its licence requirements to allow the changes. In June 2019, the Department and the Trust had agreed a memorandum of understanding that set out key principles and working arrangements between the two bodies.

The Department has two main measures of success for its three-year improvement programme. First, for the proportion of UTCs rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted to be the same as for free schools generally; in August 2019, of the schools it had inspected, Ofsted had rated 52% of UTCs as good or outstanding, compared with 84% of free schools. And second, for the proportion of UTCs on the ESFA's national concerns list to be the same as for academies generally (1%); in July 2019, 26% (13) of UTCs had been on the national concerns list.

In its report, Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities, the Public Accounts Committee warned that many children with SEND were being failed by the support system. Inspections of support for children and young people with SEND, jointly carried out by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission, had found that half of local authority areas (47 of the 94 areas inspected by the end of July 2019) had significant weaknesses.

Mainstream primary and secondary schools were struggling to meet the needs of pupils with SEND and to cope with those who had challenging behaviour. In September 2019, the Department had announced a review of support for children with SEND, to improve the services for families who needed support, equip staff in schools and colleges to respond effectively to their needs, and end the “postcode lottery” that children and families often faces. While the Department for Education had accepted that it had defined the outcomes it had expected the system of support for children with SEND to achieve only in general terms, but the DfE agreed that defining the outcomes more precisely would be an important area of focus for its review.

The PAC recommended that the Department should, as a matter of urgency, complete and publish its SEND review, which should set out the actions that the Department and others would take to secure the necessary improvements in support for children with SEND, and the timescale within which families would see practical changes. The PAC said that it would expect the Department to explain the evidence it had used to support its conclusions, and to set out what quantified goals it would use to measure success in the short, medium and long term.

The Department had acknowledged that there were
significant unexplained disparities between different groups of children in the support they received, and that, while some children were well supported, others were not. However, the Department had been unable to explain the wide variations between different demographic groups in the proportion of children identified as having SEND.

Nearly twice as many boys than girls aged 5–17 had SEND—20.2% compared with 10.7%. The proportion of pupils with SEND also varied by ethnicity, from 8.0% of Chinese pupils to 15.5% of black pupils. But the Department suspected that there had been under-identification of some special needs, such as, autism in girls. The Department told the PAC that each local area’s school improvement team had received tailored data on local pupils with SEND, including information about ethnicity, which it expected local areas to use to understand and address disparities.

The PAC recommended that the Department should use the data it already collected to develop a better, evidence-based understanding of why there was so much variation between different groups of children in identifying SEND. The PAC stressed that in particular, it should be able to explain why more boys than girls had been identified with SEND, and whether needs were consistently identified in boys and girls, and in certain ethnic groups. The PAC recommended that the Department should publish the results of its analysis and details of the action it planned to take in response.

The PAC argued that too many pupils with SEND were excluded from school and pupils with SEND were far more likely to be excluded from school than others, as they had accounted for 44.9% of permanent exclusions and 43.4% of fixed-period exclusions in 2017/18. In May 2019, the Timpson review of school exclusions had concluded that vulnerable groups of children were more likely to be excluded and that more should be done to ensure that exclusion was used consistently and fairly.

The Government had accepted the review’s 30 recommendations in principle. PAC pointed out that while schools had the right to exclude pupils as a last resort, the Department had acknowledged that the level of exclusions of pupils with SEND was not acceptable. The PAC stressed that good EHC plans, and early identification of special needs, could both result in fewer exclusions if they led to children getting the right support at school. The Department said that it was
focusing on behaviour management and support in schools to reduce the number of exclusions.

The PAC recommended that the Department should set out the steps it proposed to take to reduce the number of children with SEND who were permanently or temporarily excluded from school, and it doing so, it should explain what action it would take in response to the recommendations in the Timpson review of school exclusions, and the reasons for its decisions.

The PAC warned that the Department relied too heavily on periodic inspection for assurance that children, particularly in mainstream schools, were being properly supported, and, in particular, the Department relied on Ofsted inspections of individual schools to provide assurance about how well the schools were supporting children with SEND. But the PAC pointed out that the frequency with which Ofsted inspected schools depended heavily on its previous inspection rating, and some schools that had been rated as outstanding at their last inspection had not been inspected for 10 years or more. PAC added that short inspections of mainstream schools may not focus on the school’s provision for pupils with SEND.

The PAC pointed out that Ofsted and the CQC had also started joint inspections of local areas’ support for children and young people with SEND in 2016, which had looked at education, health and social care services for each local authority area as a whole. The Department considered that the difficult financial position of many local authorities and schools had helped to explain why half of the local areas inspected had not been meeting the expected standards. PAC noted that the Department had relied on Ofsted and the CQC revisiting local areas that had significant weaknesses, as a means of checking whether the quality of support had improved. Of the 18 local areas revisited, seven had been found to be performing at the expected standard, which meant that 11 had not improved enough.

The PAC recommended that the Department should supplement inspection evidence by drawing on other information to get a rounded, timely assessment of the quality of support for children with SEND. The information should include, for example, intelligence from regional schools commissioners, parent carer forums, schools forums, and head teachers. To give parents confidence that the Department was drawing on all relevant information in carrying out its system
oversight role, the Department should explain on its website what information it collected and how it was being used.

The PAC argued that mainstream schools had little financial incentive to be inclusive of pupils with SEND, and the way that funding was allocated to mainstream schools could act as a disincentive to enrolling pupils with SEND. PAC noted that schools had to cover the first £6,000 of extra support costs for each pupil with SEND from their core budgets. While the Department had consulted on the appropriateness of the £6,000 threshold, it said that the responses had been inconclusive, and that it needed to avoid creating perverse incentives for schools to over-identify SEND, since it would neither be appropriate for children’s needs or conducive to value for money. The PAC pointed out that while local authorities could allocate additional funding to support genuinely inclusive mainstream schools with high numbers of pupils with SEND, in 2018–19, only 85 of 150 local authorities had budgeted for additional support.

The PAC recommended that the Department should work with schools and other stakeholders, and draw on good practice, to identify how funding mechanisms could be used more effectively to strike the right balance between incentivising schools to be inclusive without encouraging over-identification of SEND.

The PAC warned that there were not enough state special school places in some parts of the country, which meant that local authorities had to cover the high cost of places in independent special schools and spend ever larger amounts on SEND transport. The PAC noted that local authorities were increasingly using independent special schools that were significantly more costly than other provision, partly because of the lack of available places in state special schools. It added that local authorities’ spending on transport to take children with SEND to and from school had risen significantly, and it had been £102 million (18.4%) over budget in 2017–18.

The Department had forecast that, by 2021, there would be 2,500 too few places in state special schools to meet demand, and it accepted that more capacity to support children with high needs would have to be created, either by improving facilities in existing schools or by setting up new special free schools. The Department hopes to locate new special schools in the areas where they would be most needed. The PAC recommended that the Department should carry out a
systematic analysis of current and future demand for school places and facilities that would be suitable for pupils with complex needs, and develop a costed plan for meeting the needs. The PAC added that in doing so, the Department should take account of potential savings in local authorities’ transport costs in areas where children currently had to travel a long distance to attend special schools.
University Technical Colleges


The Committee of Public Accounts report noted that the Department for Education had introduced university technical colleges in 2010 as an innovative model of secondary school focused on providing technical education for young people aged 14 to 19. But, while some UTCs had been successful, many had struggled to recruit students and to be financially viable over a number of years.

Ten UTCs had closed, over half of the 48 UTCs that had opened in October 2019 had been rated as less than good by Ofsted, and 14 UTCs had accounted for nearly 10% of the total cumulative revenue deficits of all academy trusts in 2017/18. The report pointed out that the Department had put in significant amounts of money to open UTCs and keep them going, including £680 million in capital funding and nearly £37 million in extra revenue funding.

Steps to make UTCs more successful and sustainable were making them less distinctive and the Committee found that UTCs were increasingly joining multi-academy trusts and extending their age range to take students from age 11, like other secondary schools. While the Department is nearing the end of its three-year programme to improve the financial and educational performance of UTCs, its vision for UTCs remains unclear.

The significant role of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust in the UTC programme, as owner of the UTC brand, is an unusual set-up. As well as receiving money from the Department to support the opening of UTCs, the Trust charges each school an annual licence fee. PAC said it was concerned by the Department’s apparent “lack of interest” in what UTCs were getting from using taxpayer’s money.

UTCs had struggled to attract enough students and three-quarters were less than 60% full. In January 2019, the 48 UTCs that had opened had been operating at 45% of capacity on average, with 13,572 students in total compared with a
maximum capacity of 29,934. Only two UTCs had been full or virtually full, and three-quarters had occupancy rates of less than 60%.

The Department explained the steps it had taken to improve the information provided to parents about UTCs to the Committee, which since 2017, had required local authorities to write to the parents of prospective pupils about their options. In addition, since January 2018, secondary schools that were not UTCs had had a statutory duty to provide their pupils with information about neighbouring UTCs.

The Department had written to five multi-academy trusts that had failed to comply with the duty. In January 2029, most students at UTCs had been boys, as 72% of UTC students had been male, compared with 50% in all secondary academies and free schools. This Committee said that the situation had been disappointing given the ambition for more girls to study STEM subjects and the focus of UTCs on technology.

PAC Recommended that the Department should work with the UTCs that had higher occupancy levels to identify and share lessons and good practice for other UTCs that were struggling to attract students.

The Committee said that the lack of students had meant that the Department had been propping up the finances of UTCs for several years, and most of the extra funding would not be paid back. The report pointed out that because the funding that schools received was mainly based on student numbers, UTCs’ failure to recruit enough students had damaged their financial viability.

In 2017/18, 14 UTC academy trusts had reported cumulative revenue deficits of £7.7 million, which had represented nearly 10% of the deficits of the 195 academy trusts that had reported deficits. The Department had provided extra funding to support UTCs’ financial position which had totalled £36.8 million between 2015–16 and 2018–19, most of which would not be paid back, and every UTC had been given transitional funding, which was not available to other schools.

The transitional funding had usually been £200,000 per year, but it will be reduced to £100,000 in 2020–21 and then it would stop. The Department told PAC that it had been tough on UTCs in recent years, in providing support to viable UTCs on the basis of strict three-year plans and closing those that were unsustainable. But the Committee argued that the Department was a long way from achieving its aim, by summer 2020, of
improving the financial performance of UTCs.

PAC recommended that the Department should set strict three-year financial targets for each UTC and at the end of the three-year period, it should be prepared to close UTCs that were not meeting the targets. The report pointed out that the Department had still not defined what success looked like for UTCs as distinct from other secondary schools. The Department’s view had been that standard exam-based measures of educational performance were not appropriate for UTCs given UTCs’ age range and technical focus. Although it regarded student destinations as a better metric, it had not adjusted its performance framework to reflect the view or to indicate how the success of UTCs should be judged.

The report pointed out that the Baker Dearing Educational Trust collected information on destinations as students left their UTC and therefore it had data for students who had left in summer 2019. In contrast, the Department publishes data on student destinations sustained over a period of time, which were therefore lagged with the most recent available data relating to students who had left in 2016/17.

Both datasets had showed that, compared with other secondary schools, a higher proportion of UTC students went on to apprenticeships. However, most of the apprenticeships were at levels 2 and 3, equivalent to GCSEs and A-levels, rather than at a higher level. The Department had committed to look at how information was presented to consider whether it could make the warning that the educational performance of UTCs should be measured differently from other secondary schools more prominent on its website.

The PAC recommended that, within three months, the Department should write to the Committee to explain how it used data on student destinations to track the performance of UTCs, and what steps it would take to better inform parents about how they could use the data to assess the benefits of a UTC education.

The Committee said it had been concerned that the Department had not been able to say what schools received in return for the £10,000 annual licence fee that they paid to the Baker Dearing Educational Trust. The Department had invited applications to set up UTCs between 2011 and 2015 and it had paid £893,000 to the Trust between 2012/13 and 2017/18 to support sponsors planning to open new UTCs.

As the Trust owns the UTC brand, a school must have a
licence to operate as a UTC and pay an annual fee to the Trust. The Trust increased the fee from £5,500 to £10,000 in 2019/20. While the Department said that the decision to pay for a licence, and any assessment of the value received in return, was a matter for individual UTCs, not the Department, PAC was concerned by the Department’s apparent “lack of interest” in the value for money that schools were getting from using taxpayer’s money to pay the licence fee for a particular model of school on top of the already generous funding that the Department had given to the Trust.

The PAC recommended that the Department should work with UTCs to obtain the information necessary to gain assurance about the value that schools were getting from the licence fee they paid to the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, and write the Committee with its findings within three months.
In its response, to the House of Commons Education Committee’s Special Educational Needs and Disabilities report, the Government welcomed the finding that the Government’s 2014 reforms had been the right ones. Although the Government had not agreed with all the Committee’s findings, it had acknowledged that, overall, the SEND system must improve, including financing local authorities to discharge their duties sufficiently.

The Committee recommended that when the Government made changes to address the challenges, it should avoid the temptation to address the problems within the system by weakening or watering down duties or making fundamental changes to the law. The Government said that the Committee’s recommendation on finance had been recognised by the Government in the significant injection of an additional £14 billion into the school system, over three years, including a 12% increase in the high needs budget for 2020–21.

The Government pointed out that in September 2019, it had announced a cross-Government review of SEND to understand how to boost outcomes and improve value for money. The Government argued that, given that the purpose of the review had been to ensure that the system delivered the best possible outcomes for children and young people, it would not be right to rule out options yet, but it did agree that any further significant legislative change would carry risk and could not solve problems in isolation.

The Committee claimed that the Department for Education had set local authorities up to fail by making serious errors in how it administered money intended for change, and also, until recently, failing to provide extra money when it had been needed. The Committee stressed that the significant shortfall in funding had been a serious contributory factor to the
failure on the part of schools and local authorities to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. But it added that, unless there was a systemic cultural shift on the part of all parties involved, additional funding would make little difference to the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND. While the Committee acknowledged the extra money provided in the spending review, for schools and social care, it deeply regretted that the spending review process had been insufficient in tackling the fundamental challenges that faced both children and adult social care. However, the Committee acknowledged the Government’s recent Budget announcement and it hoped that the issue would be tackled at that point.

The Committee argued that as nobody benefitted when Departments avoided accountability and tried to pass the buck, the DfE and the Department for Health and Social Care, should develop mutually beneficial options for cost- and burden-sharing with the health and social care sector. The Government did not accept the Committee’s funding recommendation for the additional costs to local authorities of the reforms, as it had provided a total of £252 million to local authorities to support them to implement the new SEND duties in the Children and Families Act 2014, which had included £70 million in 2014 to help local authorities prepare and £153 million of “new burdens” funding through the SEND Reform Grant, distributed from 2014–15 to 2017–18, which had played a key role in enabling local authorities to review the 237,111 statements of SEN they had maintained in 2014 and converted them into new EHC plans. The Government added that it had also provided a further £29 million in 2017–18 to help local authorities embed the reforms, which had been distributed through an un-ringfenced s31 grant.

The Government said that through the cross-Government SEND Review, it was working with the Treasury and a number of other Government Departments and bodies to understand the total costs of supporting pupils with SEND, including those which fell outside the education system. It added that more broadly, it was also planning to launch a large-scale value for money study of SEND provision as part of the SEND Futures initiative, which would provide information on the outcomes achieved and costs of different types of settings for children and young people with EHC plans in England. The Government pointed out that the current National SEND
Tribunal Trial had been piloting whether the First Tier Tribunal making non-binding recommendations on health and social care matters was an effective means of ensuring better join up. It added that although the trial had been due to end on 31 August 2020, given the understandable pressures local areas were under as a result of COVID-19, the Government argued that it was not the right time to introduce any changes to the policy, as it had decided to extend the trial until 31 August 2021.

A second round of inspections
The Committee said it had been pleased that the Department for Education had asked CQC and Ofsted to design a second round of inspections for beyond 2021. But it stressed that simply designing “a revisit programme” to “keep going on that improvement journey” was insufficient. The Committee argued that the joint CQC and Ofsted inspections should not continue to be one-offs but should become part of an annual inspection process to which all local authorities and their partners would be subject. The Committee said that CQC and Ofsted should be funded to deliver the rigorous inspection timetable, and CQC and Ofsted should design and implement an inspection regime that would improve practice and have a rigorous framework to enable local authorities and their partners to be held to account, as well as setting a strict timeframe for re-inspections.

The Government said that it had accountability arrangements in place, at both the educational setting level and the local area level, to hold partners to account for supporting children and young people with SEND. It added that in terms of local areas, the Ofsted/CQC joint SEND inspection framework set out that LAs and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) were jointly responsible for leading the response to findings. The Government pointed out that where concerns were identified, local areas were required to produce a Written Statement of Action (WSoA) setting out how they would address one or more areas of significant weakness identified by the inspectors.

The Committee pointed out that two select committees had independently identified a problem with the current extent of the powers of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Committee called on the DfE to introduce legislative proposals to allow the Ombudsman to consider what
took place within a school, rather than only being able to look at “everything up to the school gate”. The Government said it would continue to communicate with the Ombudsman and stakeholders to ensure that complaints were handled appropriately.

The Committee argued that the DfE was not taking enough responsibility for ensuring that its reforms were overseen, that practice in local authorities was lawful, that statutory timescales were adhered to, and that children’s needs were being met. It warned that the Department had left it to local authorities, inspectorates, parents and the courts to operate and police the system. The Government insisted that it had accountability arrangements in place, at the educational setting level and the local area level, to hold partners to account for supporting children and young people with SEND.

The Committee urged the Government to introduce a reporting and accountability mechanism for non-compliance so that parents and schools could report directly to the Department for Education where local authorities appeared not to be complying with the law. The Committee also recommended that an annual scorecard should be implemented for local authorities and health bodies to measure their success against the SEND reforms including, but not limited to, reports of non-compliance; the school placement of children and young people with SEND, including those without a school place; Tribunal hearings, and how local authorities met statutory timescales.

Accountability measures
The Government argued that the accountability measures already in place, along with published performance data and existing routes for raising complaints about local authority performance, addressed the concern. But it added that where parents had significant concerns, they could already access the local authority complaints system or approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or First Tier Tribunal (SEND), and they were supported in doing so by the Independent Advice and Support Services which existed in every local area, and through a range of charities and other organisations, such as the Independent Parental Special Educational Advice. The Government added that parents could also write directly to the Secretary of State to ask him to intervene where a local area had failed to meet its statutory
duties or it had acted unreasonably in doing so. The Government pointed out that while it was not a requirement for local authorities to publish a scorecard, they were required to publish and maintain a Local Offer, which described the full range of services available locally.

The Committee called on the Government to make the notional budget a focus of its review into the financial arrangements of provision for pupils with SEND, and for those in alternative provision, paying particular attention to ensuring that the funding system worked for children and young people with SEND who did not need EHCPs so that they would not be inevitably dragged into that part of the system. The Government said that the SEND Review was considering ways to deliver greater consistency in the quality and availability of provision to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, including those without EHC plans.

The Committee said that while it had heard a lot about local authorities' poor performance, children who received SEN Support, relied primarily on their school to get their support needs right. The Committee was pleased that Ofsted's new framework included a focus on children with SEND. But the Committee did not believe that enough was being done to ensure that every pupil with SEND received a high standard of education and that all schools were inclusive. It stressed that Ofsted must deliver a clear judgement and assure parents, that schools were delivering for individual children with SEND, either through its existing programme of inspections, or alternatively developing a separate type of specialised inspection that would focus on SEND and the school's responsibility to deliver for pupils on SEN Support.

Ofsted said that following extensive consultation with providers, parents and stakeholders, the effectiveness of SEND provision featured prominently in the new framework. It pointed out that in EIF inspections, inspectors took a rounded view of the quality of education that a school provided to all its pupils, including those with SEND, from the start of schooling to the point when pupils left.
A-level Results


On 11 July 2020, the Education Select Committee published the first report of its inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on education and children’s services, which focused on the cancellation of the 2020 summer exams and subsequent issuing of grades to students. The Government said that it had welcomed the report and the Committee’s ongoing enquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on education.

The Government pointed out that following the concerns that had arisen after the issuing of AS and A-level results on 13 August, there would no longer be a standardisation process for AS, A-levels and GCSEs (or extended project and AEA qualifications). Instead, centre assessment grades for AS, A-levels and GCSEs in summer 2020 would be awarded (unless the grade was lower than a student’s calculated grade, in which case the calculated grade would stand).

The decision to revert to centre assessment grades meant that several of the recommendations in the Committee’s July report regarding calculated grades addressed a system which no longer applied in the same way as it had when the report had been published.

The Government’s response to the Education Committee’s recommendations

The Committee pointed out that while Ofqual and the National Careers Service would be offering helplines to provide support and advice on and after results day, two helplines must not mean a two-tier system.

The Committee also urged Ofqual to ensure that advice and support would be easily accessible for all pupils unhappy with their grades, and the helplines provided by Ofqual and the
National Careers Service must be freephone lines, staffed by dedicated professionals with the training to provide sound and impartial step-by-step advice and support on appeals.

The Government said that the Department for Education’s Exam Results Helpline was delivered by the National Careers Service but callers to the helpline also had direct access to experienced careers advisers who could advise on the different options available to them including T-levels, A-levels, GCSEs, BTECs, apprenticeships and other vocational options.

The Government added that support was also available on clearing, university, gap years and the autumn exam series, and the helpline had been extended beyond its usual cut off point until 18 September. The Government added that Ofqual had also been running a helpline for students, as well as a dedicated helpline for MPs to raise issues on behalf of their constituents.

The Committee stressed that fairness and accessibility must be the guiding principles of an autumn exam series and the Department must provide guidance for schools and colleges by outlining minimum requirements for provision of teaching support for pupils opting for an autumn exam.

The Government said that in most cases, students receiving grades in the summer would be able to use them to move onto their next step of education or employment. But it added that there were some individuals, such as private candidates, who had not been able to receive grades the summer which was one of the reasons why an autumn exam series would be held for all subjects.

The Government pointed out that the Department had launched an Exam Support Service which was open to all types of schools and colleges to help manage the logistics of the additional autumn series, and guidance had been published for exam centres regarding how to use the Exam Support Service. The Government added that for schools and colleges that may not be able to run exams on their own sites without disruption to study, they would be able to book venues through the Government’s specialist venue supplier or make their own arrangements and claim it back, as the sites would be fully funded. The Government explained that schools and colleges would also be offered the opportunity to book Disclosure and Barring Service checked invigilators through an approved supplier to support the delivery of autumn exams.
The Government stressed that students and their families should not have to meet the cost of fees for entry into the autumn series and schools and colleges should not face additional costs for fees, over and above what they would have paid had summer exams gone ahead. It pointed out that the Exam Support Service would provide funding to ensure that schools and colleges would not incur a net loss, taking their autumn fees and any rebates they received in respect of summer exams together. The Government added that schools and colleges would be able to make claims for any deficit between the cost of their autumn fees and summer fee rebates later in the autumn term.

The Committee argued that modifications to assessments would lead to erosion of standards, and that the 2021 cohort of exam-takers could be disadvantaged by a perception that their exams had not been rigorous as those taken by other cohorts. The Committee concluded that a short delay for exams in summer 2021 would be preferable to modifications to exam content, although any delay must be a matter of weeks, not months. It added that Ofqual must publish details of the 2021 exam series as soon as possible, and before the end of the summer term.

The Government said that from 2 July to 16 July, Ofqual had consulted on a range of possible adaptations to GCSE, AS and A-level exams and assessments in 2021 on a subject-by-subject basis, to ensure that exams and assessments would be as fair as possible. In particular, the consultation had proposed, a range of ways to free up additional time for teaching (including the possibility of a slight delay to the exams timetable in 2021) and to accommodate any public health requirements next year. The Government pointed out that on 3 August, Ofqual had published a summary of the responses and the decisions taken in light of the responses.

The Government pointed out that, in line with the Secretary of State’s letter to Ofqual of 18 June, the subject content that formed the foundation of GCSEs, AS and A-level qualifications would not be changed. However, in certain subjects with a high volume of content, centres would have a choice of topics on which their students would be required to answer questions in their exams in 2021, to reduce teaching time and pressure on students and their schools and colleges.

The Government insisted that, overall, the changes confirmed by Ofqual would help to ensure that young people
taking exams in 2021 would have the same opportunities to progress as the students before them. With regard to the timing of exams next year, the Government said that the Secretary of State had asked Ofqual in a letter on 18 June, to consider a short delay to the GCSE, A and AS level exam timetable in 2021, to free up additional teaching time.

The Committee argued that post-16 learners, whether they were resitting key English and Maths GCSEs, or preparing to sit final exams before entering higher education or the workplace, deserved catch-up support. It stressed that the Government must extend catch-up funding to include disadvantaged post-16 pupils by doubling the disadvantage element in the 16–19 funding formula for pupils in Year 12, for at least the next year. The Committee added that any post-16 pupils attending Alternative Provision and Pupil Referral Units, and those training for basic skills, must also be eligible for catch-up funding.

The Government said that it had made up to £96 million available for the 2020/21 academic year to support 16–19-year-old students via the 16 to 19 Tuition Fund and funding had been ring fenced for schools, colleges and all other 16 to 19 providers to mitigate the disruption to education arising from Covid-19. It added that the funding was being provided to support small group tuition for 16 to 19 students in English, maths, and other courses where education had been disrupted.

The Government pointed out that all 16–19 providers in receipt of ESFA funding (either directly or via a local authority) were eligible to receive an allocation, and all 16–19 students (except those in special schools and alternative provision) in schools, academies, special post-16 institutions and independent training providers were in scope, where they met the fund criteria. The Government added that all special and alternative provision schools were being provided with catch-up premium funding in line with the specialist setting rates for schools.

Ofqual's response to the Education Committee's recommendations
In response to Getting the Grades They've Earned: COVID-19: The cancellation of exams and calculated grades, Ofqual said that it had already provided responses to some of the recommendations in its letter of 6 August, when it had confirmed the steps it had taken ahead of results days to
respond to the Committee’s report.

The Committee recommended that Ofqual’s evaluation must include comprehensive data on attainment, by characteristics including gender, ethnicity, SEND, looked after children, and FSM eligibility, to provide full transparency on whether there were statistically significant differences between attainment this year compared with previous years.

Ofqual cited its interim technical report, which had been published on A-level results day, which had included equalities analyses of calculated results at both centre level and student level. Ofqual added that it would have published a similar report on GCSE results day if calculated grades had been the sole method of issuing grades. Ofqual said that it would continue to evaluate summer 2020, including an updated equalities analysis on the final grades issued, which would be published.

Ofqual explained that its initial equalities analyses of calculated grades had examined the extent to which the relationship between grade outcomes and student background variables in 2018 and 2019 would have been maintained in 2020. However, the analyses had showed no evidence of bias in calculated grades. For calculated grades, changes in outcomes for students with different protected characteristics and from different socio-economic backgrounds had been similar to those seen between 2018 and 2019 and generally there had been no widening of the gaps in attainment between different groups of students.

Ofqual said that it was carrying out further analyses of the 2020 outcomes (centre assessment grades (CAGs) or calculated grades, whichever was higher) to consider whether there had been any impact on students who shared particular protected characteristics or socio-economic status. However, Ofqual said that early indications had suggested that there had been no material differences in the attainment gaps between different groups of students for the grades that had been given to students this year compared with the calculated grades that would have been issued.

The Committee urged Ofqual to identify whether there was evidence that groups such as BAME pupils, FSM eligible pupils, children looked after, and pupils with SEND had been systematically disadvantaged by calculated grades, and is so, Ofqual’s standardisation model must adjust the grades of the pupils affected upwards.

Ofqual said that along with the Committee and others,
we had been particularly concerned to make sure that arrangements would not exacerbate the attainment gaps between different groups of students that had been seen in previous years. It confirmed that on 21 July ahead of results days, an initial analyses of GCSE AS and A-level calculated grades had suggested that there would generally be no widening of the gaps in attainment between different groups of students. Therefore, Ofqual said that it had concluded that it would not be necessary to adjust the calculated grades of particular groups of students as suggested in the recommendation. Ofqual pointed out that while its analyses of calculated grades had showed no evidence of systemic bias, it recognised the potential for individual concerns about bias or discrimination, and how any such concerns should be raised had been covered in its student guide to appeals and malpractice or maladministration complaints.

The Committee called on Ofqual to be completely transparent about its standardisation model and publish the model immediately to allow time for scrutiny. It also urged Ofqual to publish an explanatory memorandum on decisions and assumptions that had been made during the model’s development, which should include how it had ensured fairness for schools without 3 years of historic data, and for settings with small, variable cohorts.

Ofqual said that it had consulted between 15 and 29 April on the aims of statistical standardisation; the approach it would use, including the sources of evidence on which it would draw; how issues relating to schools and colleges with improving or declining historical results should be considered; and potential bias in CAGs, the details of which had been published on 22 May. In particular Ofqual said it had confirmed that a statistical approach would mean that an individual student’s grade would be informed by their position in the centre’s rank order for that subject, their prior attainment where available, and the centre’s past performance. Ofqual added that it had also confirmed that for small cohorts in schools and colleges for which “the data would be weaker”, it would “ensure that the standardisation model is sensitive to the size of error in the statistical predictions”.

Ofqual pointed out that it had published further information on 21 July, after the deadline had passed for schools and colleges to submit their CAGs and rank order information. But it argued that providing more information
earlier, mid-way through the period in which schools and colleges had been submitting CAGs and rank order information, could have risked making teachers anxious, either because they thought they needed to take account of the information in their submission, or because they had already submitted their data and therefore could not take account of the extra information. Ofqual added that there had also been a risk that centre behaviour could change if additional information had been published, but on 21 July, it had provided a detailed fact sheet and film and as well as information about the anticipated results.

Ofqual said that it had chosen not to publish the full model ahead of A-level results day, because everyone should find out their results on results day. Ofqual said that while early publication of the final details of the model could have allowed some centres to work out results early or cause unhelpful anxiety if the information had been misunderstood, the information it had published prior to that point had provided significant detail on the approach and it had allowed a detailed understanding of the standardisation process.

Ofqual pointed out that it had published its technical report on A-level results day (13 August) and the report and associated documentation had confirmed the decisions and the assumptions that had been made during the model’s development, the model itself, and it had provided a detailed technical account of the approach to awarding GCSE, AS, A-level, Advanced Extension Award and Extended Project Qualifications. It added that the report had also included metrics on the accuracy of results.

Ofqual explained that for schools or colleges with a small number of entries in a subject, and for those schools and colleges that did not have historical results data, the statistical standardisation process operated differently, which was necessary because the statistics were less reliable for smaller cohorts. Ofqual said that in the interests of fairness to individual students, the model had moved from statistical evidence as the primary source of evidence for determining students’ calculated grades to placing greater and, in some cases, sole weight on the CAGs. It added that the report had set out how Ofqual had determined that for cohorts of fewer than 15 students, progressively less weight should be placed on the statistical evidence and that for cohorts of 5 or fewer, or where there was no historical evidence, the CAG would be the student’s grade.
The Committee urged Ofqual to collect and publish anonymised data at the conclusion of the appeals process on where it had received appeals from, including, as a minimum, type of school attended, region, gender, ethnicity, SEND status, children looked after (including children supported by virtual schools), and FSM eligibility.

Ofqual said that it published statistics on appeals for GCSE and AS and A-level qualifications each year and the statistics were published as Official Statistics having met the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Ofqual explained that to comply with the Code, it had to ensure that statistics were trustworthy, that they were of high quality and that they had value for those who used them. Ofqual pointed out that this year, it planned to publish statistics on appeals in GCSE and AS and A-level qualifications for the summer 2020 series in December 2020.

Ofqual said that the statistics it published included the number of appeals received and upheld, the number of grades challenged and changed, the average number of days taken to complete an appeal and a breakdown of the different reasons for appeals, which would also be published this year. Ofqual said that it was considering publishing additional data, such as, breaking down appeals by geographical region, gender, ethnicity and centre type. However, Ofqual pointed out that, where numbers and groupings were small, it would be important to make sure that individual candidates could not be identified. Ofqual added that while such a guide would help it to decide on the granularity with which it could publish appeals data, it would only be clear once the final appeals data from the exam boards had been received in the third week of November.

The Committee recommended that as part of its evaluation, Ofqual must publish comprehensive data on vocational and technical qualifications, by characteristics including gender, ethnicity, SEND, children looked after, and FSM eligibility, to provide full transparency on whether there were statistically significant differences between attainment this year compared with previous years.

Ofqual said that it had already published some information about results issued for vocational and technical and other general qualifications at Levels 3 and 4 on 13 August. Having evaluated whether, within the cohort, different demographic and socio-economic groups appeared to show different patterns of outcomes compared to previous years,
Ofqual said it had concluded that in most cases attainment gaps had not increased between different demographic groups. It added that where that had been some specific cases where attainment gaps had appeared to change, they had been small.

Ofqual said that it had recently received revised data from awarding organisations (covering those results that were regraded) to complete further analysis in the coming weeks, which would form part of its evaluation of summer 2020 awarding. Ofqual added that it would continue to publish quarterly information about vocational and technical qualifications, and information covering April to June 2020 would be published on 17 September.

The Committee recommended that, where calculated grades had been used to award vocational and technical qualifications this year, Ofqual must identify whether there was evidence that groups such as BAME pupils, FSM eligible pupils, children looked after, and pupils with SEND had been systematically disadvantaged by calculated grades. It added that if that was the case, Ofqual’s standardisation model must adjust the grades of the pupils affected upwards.

Ofqual pointed out that unlike GCSEs, AS and A-levels, there was no overarching statistical standardisation model for vocational and technical qualifications and other general qualifications. Ofqual explained that to cater for the breadth of the VTQ landscape, it had designed its extraordinary regulatory framework to allow awarding organisations flexibility to determine the most suitable approach for their qualifications. Ofqual pointed out that it had been used by 147 awarding organisations for around 15,000 qualifications. It said that in all cases, awarding organisations had been responsible for designing assessment models, within the framework of Ofqual’s rules, that allowed assessments to be made in the most fair and valid way for the qualification type.

The Committee called on Ofqual to urgently publish the evidence thresholds for proving bias or discrimination, by setting out what evidence would be required, including example case studies, for parents and pupils in advance of results day.

Ofqual said that, ahead of results days on 6 August, it had published a guide for students, which had explained what they should do if they had concerns or questions about their grades. Ofqual pointed out that the guide had made clear that, in the first instance, students should ask their school or college
to check whether it had made an administrative error when submitting information to the exam board.

Ofqual said that the guide had explains how a student concerned that their grade had been affected by some sort of wrongdoing or a lack of care by their school or college, including any concerns of potential bias or discrimination, should complain, as it would be considered as a complaint of malpractice or maladministration.

Ofqual pointed out that the guide included information to help students understand whether they had cause to complain and what students would need to show evidence of something specific or surprising in relation to the grade submitted by their school or college and give examples of how a student might look for evidence that something had gone wrong.

The Committee argued that where pupils with SEND, or their families, had concerns about their grade, they must be allowed to see the evidence, such as past work or mock exams, that had been used by teachers to arrive at their calculated grade. It added that if appropriate access arrangements had not been in place for the work used, or if their school had not used evidence from SEND specialists if that had been appropriate, the pupil must be allowed to appeal on the basis of malpractice or maladministration.

Ofqual insisted that it had provided information for students concerned about malpractice or maladministration, including concerns that a reasonable adjustment or evidence relating to a student's disability had not been taken into account. Ofqual added that it would expect that the student's school or college would explain how their CAG had been determined and the evidence available to the student.

Ofqual said that if a school or college had made a mistake that had disadvantaged a student, for example by not taking into account their reasonable adjustment, it should raise the issue with the exam board under the appeals arrangements. But Ofqual stressed that it would only be in cases where the school or college did not believe it had made an error that a student would need to complain about malpractice or maladministration. Ofqual argued that, while schools and colleges could not provide students with particular forms of evidence, students had a legal right to request information held about them by their school or college as set out by the Information Commissioner’s Office. It added that exam boards may decide to request further information and explanation from
The Committee recommended that Ofqual must ensure that advice and support was easily accessible for all pupils who were unhappy with their grades, and the helplines provided by Ofqual and the National Careers Service must be freephone lines, staffed by dedicated professionals with the training to provide sound and impartial step-by-step advice and support on appeals.

Ofqual said that it provided full training for colleagues staffing its helpline to take calls in the run up to, on and after results days. It added that it also supported the training of the careers advisers who staffed the Government’s national Exam Results Helpline. It added that the Ofqual helpline was charged at standard network rate and the Exam Results Helpline was a freephone number.

The Committee recommended that Ofqual should issue guidance to schools and colleges about the options available for pupils who were unhappy with their results. It called for letters to pupils to be sent out by schools and colleges, to ensure that they were aware of their options, including the standard of evidence required to bring an appeal on the basis of bias or discrimination.

Ofqual said it had issued a number of guidance documents aimed at students and schools and colleges, which had been published on its website, which had received over a million downloads this year. It added that it had received over four million impressions on its posts to social media. Ofqual pointed out that it had written to all schools and colleges on 27 July with information about the year’s arrangements, which had provided links to the student guide and other resources for students, parents and carers. It added that hard copies of these documents had been provided to schools and colleges for them to give to students, parents and carers.

The Committee called on Ofqual to urgently publish dates for the autumn exam series and end uncertainty for pupils, teachers, schools and colleges.

Ofqual said that on 9 July, the Joint Council for Qualifications, which represented the exam boards, had announced that the timetable would run as followed:
• GCE AS and A-level examinations start on Monday 5 October and finish on Friday 23 October.
• GCSE examinations start on Monday 2 November and finish.
on Monday 23 November.

The deadlines for entry were:
• GCE AS & A-level – 4 September.
• GCSE (except English Language and Mathematics) – 18 September.
• GCSE (English Language and Mathematics) – 4 October.

The Committee recommended a short delay for exams in summer 2021 as preferable to modifications to exam content. It stressed that any delay must be a matter of weeks, not months and Ofqual must publish details of the 2021 exam series as soon as possible, and before the end of the summer term.

Ofqual said it had consulted from 1 to 16 July on arrangements for the 2021 summer exam series and it had asked about the desirability of delaying the GCSE, AS and A-level exam timetable. Having received almost 29,000 responses, Ofqual said it had published a summary of the responses and the decisions it had taken in light of the feedback on 3 August.

Ofqual pointed out that 68% of those who had responded to the consultation, had been in favour of a delay to the GCSE exam timetable and 60% had been in favour of a delay to the A-level timetable. But support had decreased to 51% and 42% respectively if, as a result of delayed exams, results days would also be delayed. Ofqual stressed that a decision to delay exams would have consequences across the education sector and the consequences would extend beyond England.

Ofqual said it proposed to the Secretary of State that it should work with the Department and the exam boards to agree a timetable and any delay to this year’s exams as a matter of urgency. It added that following its consultation, Ofqual had asked exam boards to make some modifications to the way in which they assessed their qualifications ahead of next summer.
Appointment of the Children’s Commissioner for England


On 8 December 2020 The Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, wrote to the Education Select Committee to say that Dame Rachel de Souza, the Chief Executive at Inspiration Trust, had been chosen as the Government’s preferred candidate to take up the post of Children’s Commissioner for England. The Committee was invited to hold a pre-appointment hearing with the candidate. (The post of Children's Commissioner for England is one of five posts that the committee holds pre-appointment hearings for before the Government makes its final decision.) The Committee held a pre-appointment hearing with Dame Rachel de Souza on Tuesday 15 December.

In advance of the hearing, the Committee held an accountability hearing with the current Children’s Commissioner, Anne Longfield OBE, to ascertain her views on the role and the challenges likely to be faced by her successor. The appointment of Children’s Commissioner is for a period of six years. Renumeration for the post was advertised at between £120,000-£130,000.

The Committee questioned Dame Rachel on the following areas:
• The role and powers of the Children’s Commissioner.
• The candidate’s priorities, if appointed.
• How her previous experiences have prepared her for this role.
• The challenges facing children and young people today.

The Department for Education supplied the Committee with a brief statement about its preferred candidate. The Department said: “Rachel has a strong history of working with children and young people and a passion for improving the lives and opportunities for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. She is
currently the Chief Executive at Inspiration Trust, a family of 14 schools from Nursery to Sixth Form based in Norfolk and north Suffolk, with the majority rated ‘Good’ and ‘Outstanding’. She is also a Trustee at Ambition Institute and has previously been an independent member of the Education Honours Committee and Trustee at the Shakespeare’s Globe. Rachel has strong experience in education, having held various teaching and headship roles.”

The Committee questioned Dame Rachel and considered her suitability for the post. In conclusion it agreed that Dame Rachel de Souza was appointable for the post, and advised the Secretary of State accordingly. Gavin Williamson then made the appointment of Dame Rachel de Souza as Children’s Commissioner for England.
This should be a significant and important report from the Education Select Committee, but coming out the day after Parliament rose for the Christmas recess when the news was full of a new strain of COVID-19, the virtual cancelling of Christmas, people flooding out of London to avoid unexpected restrictions and Government plans for schools next term that are widely seen to be impossible to implement at such short notice, it will be little short of miraculous if this report gets the attention that it deserves.

Challenges
The report starts by acknowledging what is already widely known, that the nation faces major skills and employment challenges. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, the changing nature of work, an ageing population, and now the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic all loom large. As a result of the pandemic, unemployment is expected to rise to a peak of 2.6 million people by the second quarter of 2021. To meet these challenges, adults will increasingly need to upskill and reskill throughout their lives. The current approach to education funding is overwhelmingly focused on education before the age of 25. The report argues powerfully that Britain must move away from this model, towards a system and culture of lifelong learning that encourages education at any age.

The report notes, correctly, that there are overwhelming benefits to lifelong learning; benefits for productivity and the economy, for health and wellbeing, and for social justice and communities. Adults who gain level 3 qualifications (equivalent to A level) see a 10% increase in earnings and are more likely to be employed, while research into community learning and mental health found that 52% of learners no longer had...
clinically significant symptoms of anxiety and depression by the end of their course.

The report describes poor access to lifelong learning as "one of the great social injustices of our time" and notes that there are significant skills gaps which urgently need to be addressed. By 2024 there will be a shortfall of four million highly skilled workers. Nine million working-age adults in England have low literacy or numeracy skills, or both, and six million adults are not qualified to level 2 (equivalent to GCSE level). Participation in adult education is at its lowest level in 23 years and funding fell by 45% between 2008–9 and 2018–19. 49% of adults from the lowest socioeconomic group have received no training since leaving school. The report concludes that "we must reverse this decline and offer a way forward".

The Education Committee believes that this can be done through "an ambitious, long-term strategy for adult skills and lifelong learning—a comprehensive and holistic vision for lifelong learning that works for every adult in every community. We heard that the lack of a coherent, long-term strategy and vision for lifelong learning has resulted in an unhelpful churn of initiatives, with the adult skills landscape lurching from one policy priority to the next. We found that there are key areas requiring urgent reform, including childcare for adult learners, English for speakers of other languages provision, modular learning, local skills offers, information, advice and guidance, and adult learning for those with SEND. Alongside these, we identified four key pillars that are needed to set the long-term foundation for a revitalised adult education system."

A community learning centre in every town
Adult community learning providers are “the jewel in the crown of the nation’s adult education landscape”. They bring learning to disadvantaged communities, providing a lifeline for adults furthest from qualifications and employment. The report notes that 92% of Local Authority community learning services are rated ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted. But there has been a 32% decline in participation in community learning between 2008–9 and 2018–19, with participation falling for five consecutive years.

In something of an understatement, the Committee concluded that it was “not persuaded that the Department fully grasps the value and purpose of community learning. Nor does it appear that the Department has a vision or strategic approach
for boosting this vital area of lifelong learning”.

The Committee wants the Department for Education to work with the sector to grasp what data exists on community learning and where any gaps might be. This should include figures for how many community learning centres exist nationally. The Department must set out “an ambitious plan” for a community learning centre in every town. These do not need to be new buildings or organisations: “we should make use of existing organisations and assets, such as colleges, church halls and libraries”.

**Introduce Individual Learning Accounts**
The Committee argues for the reintroduction of Individual Learning Accounts, funded through the National Skills Fund. Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) would devolve funding to learners, giving them choice and agency over their learning and career development. The Committee accepts that failures of the ILA scheme in 2000–01 have meant that ILAs remain “political kryptonite for English policymaking”. But provided lessons are learnt, ILAs could kickstart participation and play a key role in enhancing the employment prospects of adults affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Department can build on small-scale schemes close to home. Scotland, for example, spent £3.7 million on funding Individual Training Accounts for around 22,000 adults over 2018/19. Ultimately, we believe Individual Learning Accounts need to have a truly lifelong emphasis, moving beyond a one-off grant, to a system where adults receive several further top-up investments throughout their working lives to revitalise training and upskilling.

**Nurse part-time Higher Education back to health**
The Committee notes that despite the clear need for the higher-level skills which are key to productivity, part-time higher education has “fallen into disrepair”. Part-time student numbers collapsed by 53% between 2008–09 and 2017–18, and the Committee heard from those giving evidence to it that the fall over this decade has resulted in over one million lost learners. The Committee therefore concluded that “we must nurse part-time higher education back to full health”.

To do so, the Department must reinstate fee grants for part-time learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds who study courses that meet the skills needs of the nation. The Department must also extend maintenance support to part-time...
distance learners.

**A skills tax credit to revitalise employer-led training**

The picture on employer investment in training was described as “bleak indeed”. The report noted that 39% of employers admit to training none of their staff, and overall, employer-led training has declined by a half since the end of the 1990s.

To restore employer-led training, the Government “must introduce tax credits for employers who invest in training for their low-skilled workers”.
1 Preface

2 The impact of research evidence on education policy: how MPs respond to evidence in relation to secondary selective education
   Alan Bainbridge, Joanne Bartley and Tom Troppe

12 SPI-M-O consensus view on the impact of mass school closures on COVID-19
   SPI-M-O

16 SPI-M-O consensus view on the potential effect of school closure on a UK COVID-19 epidemic
   Imperial College, London & others

20 Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand
   Imperial College, London

32 Timing of the introduction of school closure for COVID-19 epidemic suppression
   Imperial College, London

34 The impact of school closures
   Warwick University

36 The impact of adding school closures to other distancing measures
   Nick Davies et al, LSHTM

41 Social mobility in education: a mixed picture
   Matt Bazzant, NFER

66 Ofsted's in-depth study of remote education
   Ofsted

89 Select Committee Reports

90 Special Educational Needs
   Education Committee

93 Investigation into UTCs
   National Audit Office

98 Special Educational Needs
   Public Accounts Committee

103 University Technical Colleges
   Public Accounts Committee

107 SEND: Government response
   Education Committee

112 A-level results
   Education Committee

124 Children’s Commissioner
   Education Committee

126 Adult skills and lifelong learning
   Education Committee