



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

22nd April 2020

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter sent on behalf of the Education Select Committee. You raise some important questions regarding the Department for Education's coronavirus (COVID-19) response – please find responses to your questions below. As activity in this area is moving at pace, we plan to provide weekly updates to the Education Select Committee moving forward.

- **Out of school learning:** *When can we expect updates on resources which will help schools and families continue their children's education away from school?*

The Department wants to do everything it can to support schools and families looking to continue children's education while they are at home. During the press conference on 19 April, I announced a package to help our most disadvantaged young people access online learning and social care, with devices being ordered for children who would otherwise not have access and are preparing for exams (in Year 10), and those who receive support from a social worker and those who are care leavers.

Institutions providing education to 16-19 year olds, including schools, can already use their 16 to 19 Bursary Fund allocation to provide devices and connectivity for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, where this is identified as a barrier to a student participating in education.

Furthermore, to support the hard work of schools in delivering remote education, 40 teachers have come together to develop the brand-new Oak National Academy, launched on Monday 20 April. Oak Academy will provide 180 video lessons for free each week, across a broad range of subjects, for every year group from Reception through to Year 10. BBC Bitesize is also offering lessons on the red button, iPlayer and their website.

The following links set out information, guidance and support for teachers, parents and leaders on educating children during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

The Department has also published an initial list of online educational resources to help children to learn at home. These websites have been identified by some of the country's leading educational experts and offer a wide range of support and resources for pupils of all ages, and will be updated on a regular basis: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources>.

The Department has published guidance on how to follow safeguarding procedures when planning remote education strategies and teaching remotely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-and-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

- **Capacity of the social care system:** *Other than emergency registration for social workers, what is the Department doing to ensure the children's social care system can meet the increased pressure it will likely now face?*

We recognise that the current context provides challenges for local authorities in delivering children's social care and therefore we are working closely with them and other partners to address those challenges. Government is providing £3.2 billion to local authorities to help address the pressures they are facing in response to coronavirus (COVID-19), including within children's social care.

Since your letter, Social Work England, the specialist regulator for 100,000 social workers in England, has reinstated the professional registration of 8,000 former social workers so they can fill vital roles in local communities in this critical situation. A new website has been launched in partnership with the Local Government Association, the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care and Social Work England to allow social workers to register their interest in applying for a role.

We are exploring options to help local authorities and fostering services identify alternative placements, either temporary or permanent, should foster carers become ill and not be able to look after the children living in their home.

Separately, Ofsted is prioritising the progression of existing children's homes registration applications. Ofsted are also waiving variation fees to enable homes to take on more children or children with different needs to those they would normally take by amending the home's statement of purpose.

The Department has issued guidance for education settings and local authorities about children supported through social care, with EHC plans or identified as vulnerable by their school or local authority: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people>.

While we know that local authorities and their local safeguarding partners will want to continue to meet their statutory duties as far as they can, there will be times in the current circumstances when this is not possible and we will continue to update our guidance and be clear that local authorities and local safeguarding

partners should feel empowered to support families and protect children to the best of their abilities. We are also considering amendments to secondary legislation to provide local authorities with additional flexibilities.

- **Critical workers:** *Can the Department clarify how critical workers will be consistently defined throughout the country, and should schools be requesting confirmation from parents/carers of their key worker status? What support will schools receive to ensure they can continue to open for the children of key workers?*

Parents whose work is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response include those who work in: health and social care; education and childcare; key public services; local and national government; food and other necessary goods; public safety and national security; transport; and utilities, communication and financial services. The full list of critical workers is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>.

Information on how schools should operationalise this guidance is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures>.

- **The effect on disadvantaged groups:** *What is the Department doing to minimise the disproportionate effect these measures will have on disadvantaged groups? We are particularly concerned about the fairness of any grading system for children and young people who would have taken formal exams this year.*

Ofqual, the independent qualifications regulator, has developed a fair and robust process for awarding grades to students who were due to sit exams this summer that takes into account a broad range of evidence to come to a view about the grade that the student is most likely to have obtained had exams gone ahead. Ofqual will make every effort to ensure that candidates are awarded a fair grade that accurately reflects their performance. Ofqual acknowledges concerns that centres may under/over-estimate how some students would have performed in their exams and the possibility that this could be more pronounced for particular groups of students.

Ofqual has published an equality impact assessment alongside a consultation which assesses the impact of the proposed arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020.

Guidance for schools and colleges about GCSEs, A and AS levels has been published, setting out how qualifications will be awarded this summer:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020>.

Ofqual is also working urgently with the relevant awarding organisations on the arrangements that will apply to other qualifications and more information will be published as soon as possible.

Ofqual have also launched a consultation, seeking views on a number of features

of the exceptional arrangements for awarding GCSEs, AS and A-Levels in 2020: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-exam-grading-and-assessment-in-2020>.

To note, if students do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam as soon as is reasonably possible after the beginning of the academic year. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021.

- **Financial impact on organisations and individuals:** *When will the Department provide details on:*
 - *The financial support available (and mechanism for accessing it) for providers, particularly early years and childcare providers and training providers.*

On 17 April the Department published guidance setting out the Government's financial support for independent providers in the education, early years and children's social care sectors. The Government has put in place a number of funding and financial measures to support organisations – both public and private – during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. These are intended to be temporary, timely, and targeted, to support public services, people and businesses through this period of disruption.

This guidance sets out the financial support that is available for different types of education, early years and children's social care providers in England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care>

- **Long-term effects:** *What work does the Department plan to undertake to evaluate the long-term effects of these measures?*

We are currently gathering intelligence to understand the immediate impacts on education due to coronavirus (COVID-19). We want to understand how educational settings and children's education and welfare have been affected whilst ensuring we don't put additional pressure on schools and colleges at a challenging time. We are working with other Government departments to understand the wider impacts of measures.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education