



Public Services Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Designing a public services workforce fit for the future

Wednesday 27 April 2022

3 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top (The Chair); Lord Bichard; Lord Davies of Gower; Lord Filkin; Lord Hogan-Howe; Lord Hunt of Kings Heath; Baroness Pinnock; Lord Porter of Spalding; Baroness Sater; Lord Willis of Knaresborough.

Evidence Session No. 11

Hybrid Proceeding

Questions 84 - 94

Witness

I: Mr Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Mr Robin Walker MP.

Q84 **The Chair:** Good afternoon, everyone. I am Hilary Armstrong and I chair the Public Services Committee in the House of Lords. We are continuing to take evidence in our examination of what sort of workforce we will need in the future in the public sector and how we make sure that we take the right decisions to secure good public services in the future.

We are very pleased that today we have two Ministers. Our first Minister is Robin Walker, and he is Minister in the Department for Education with primary responsibility for schools—no insignificant challenges there. We are pleased that you are with us this afternoon, and I want to open up with the obvious question. We already know there are demographic changes going on in the country, and they are likely to go on. We have fairly good evidence for the next few years, but beyond that we need longer-term planning than just the next four to five years. Given the demographic changes that we know will be facing us, what is the department's plan to build the necessary capacity in the workforce?

Mr Robin Walker: Thank you very much, and thanks for the opportunity to give evidence to this committee.

To answer your question on demographics, it is a complex picture and we use a significant amount of data, including pupil projections, to help predict the size of workforces required in the future in the system. My primary responsibility, as you reflect, is schools and, therefore, teachers and the teaching workforce.

I think you will have heard from my official, Caroline Pusey, when she gave evidence to the committee, about the modelling work that we do with the teacher workforce model in that respect. It is worth pointing out that the overall number of pupils, about 8.9 million pupils, were in the system as of January 2021, which is a small increase from the previous year. Looking ahead, the demographic changes mean that the primary pupil population is expected to decrease over a number of years to 2030, while the secondary population is continuing to increase up to 2024. That creates different pressures at different phases and is one of the things that we must plan for in our modelling.

That is all taken into account with the teacher workforce model, which estimates the future national teacher demand in England. It considers the impact of a wide range of factors, including but not limited to the pupil number projections, economic impact, secondary school curriculum changes, retirements and teacher demographics. It is a complex piece of work.

It is also important that we do not just think of this in terms of recruitment. It is a retention challenge and one of the important cultural changes that the department made before my time was to look at recruitment and retention as part of one holistic approach on this. That is something that we tried to build on in our recent White Paper *Opportunity*

for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child. The importance of CPD in that as something that reinforces the recruitment message about teachers being well supported but also is crucially a tool for retention is absolutely essential. We are setting out an unprecedented programme of CPD, with half a million training opportunities by 2024, giving all teachers and school leaders access to world class, evidence-based programmes through the early career framework and also the national professional qualifications for people with potential to move up to leadership roles. It is that combination of being able to look at the recruitment picture and retention and development of teachers that allows us to meet the challenge.

The other point that I think is fair to reflect is that the pandemic has had a short-term, perhaps positive, impact on retention and recruitment numbers, in that we saw very strong recruitment numbers, perhaps due to the economic difficulties of people looking elsewhere. Of course, we expect that to unwind and we are now in a very competitive job market. In that very competitive job market, it reinforces the importance of something that is a manifesto commitment, which we have recommitted to in the schools White Paper, to £30,000 starting salaries and we have recommended that to the STRB as part of the current process. I think that is one of the things that will help us to recruit more of the teachers, particularly the secondary teachers, that we need to over the coming years.

The Chair: Thank you. There are real shortages in some areas, and I do not mean geographic areas but subject areas. It is very difficult to see how they will be filled in the future. Do you see different ways of dealing with that? We have seen estimates of much larger class groups for some subjects, for example. It strikes me that, if that is going to be the case, you need a totally different model of how you deliver high-quality teaching with fewer people with the right skill level able to do that. What are you thinking about in that arena?

Mr Robin Walker: I will come back on that first in how, if you look at ITT and how we recruit in this space, and we look at the postgraduate ITT figures in particular, we are currently hitting our targets for primary and we are overall, over the piece, getting to about 100% of target. The challenge is specific subjects in secondary, and it is specific subject knowledge, particularly in areas such as some STEM subjects. Computing is particularly challenging and part of that is to do with the competitive landscape that it is in. There is also modern foreign languages, which is a particular interest of mine, and how we can make sure that we address that. It is about targeting those areas, which we can partly do with our bursaries and our approach.

We set limits on the class sizes at the early years and infant level in schools. There is greater flexibility for schools further up. We do not see a need to significantly increase class sizes across the piece, but of course it is about the schools looking at what works and what works in an evidence-based way. I have come across, with some of my own local

schools, cases where they think they have a particularly exceptional teacher and it is worth putting that teacher in front of a larger class. The evidence is that the most important factor in how children learn is the quality of teaching. The investment we are making in CPD to reinforce the quality of teaching and strengthen that and make sure we are following evidence-based approaches is the right way.

You said that this is not a geographical question, but there is an element to that, which is that the shortages of teachers, particularly in STEM, are most severe in areas that are also relatively educationally underperforming and areas of high deprivation. That is why we have introduced in the White Paper the levelling-up premium, which is specifically to target support for teachers in target areas as not just a recruitment but also a retention bonus of up to £3,000 a year over a number of years, so that we can get the maths, physics, computing and languages teachers to where they are most needed in the country. That is new, it has not been done before on that basis, but it is a very important intervention in that respect.

The Chair: It was done a long time ago, but never mind.

Mr Robin Walker: Okay. That is the trouble with coming to the Lords.

The Chair: The report in 1964, I think it was, recommended teacher premiums in areas of deprivation.

Mr Robin Walker: It is good to know that we have finally got round to delivering some of those things.

The Chair: We did it for a while. Anyway, there are lots of things that I want to follow up, but it is not my job to do that. One very quick thing is that some private schools are saying, "We can do the basic teaching to a bigger group but with the help of things like AI we can know how each pupil is doing and use the teachers much more effectively", but that means a different model of teaching and being prepared to look at things in a different way.

Mr Robin Walker: My Secretary of State is very keen that we use digital wherever possible to empower teachers to reduce workload, to make sure that we are taking the opportunities of that. I think that there is a crucial point here that digital is not, and never really can be, a replacement for high-quality face-to-face teaching. It is one of the things that we saw during the pandemic; schools did a fantastic job with the remote education that they provided and with the response there, but it is not the same and never will be.

We must be careful that, where we use tech—and we see opportunities in using tech to support the profession and enhance the ability of great teachers to have the interactions that they need—to not in any way replace the role of quality teaching. I would always draw that distinction. A good example of that, and something that I think has empowered teachers and allowed teachers to have greater reach, is the work that

Oak did during the pandemic. It was put together very much as a response to the need for remote education, but teachers were able to come together, work out really well-sequenced curriculum material and demonstrate that. We have seen that the profession are valuing that for what they can learn from it, how they can feed that into the work that they are doing in their own schools, not just as a tool for remote education.

That is one of the reasons why we took the decision that we announced alongside the White Paper to convert that into an ALB and look at how that can become a future curriculum body that can help to exemplify some of the best practice in this space. That is not trying to replace what teachers do, but to take some of the best examples and project them out to the system in a way that can then hopefully engage with and encourage a debate within the profession.

Q85 Lord Bichard: Minister, you rightly said that it is not just about recruitment but retention. One of the crunch points in retention has traditionally and historically been at the end of the first year. This is a tough profession, and a lot of people find that it is tougher than they thought it would be. My daughter did that, but I managed to persuade her, on your behalf, to stay.

Mr Robin Walker: Thank you.

Lord Bichard: You may not have it with you now, but are you keeping an eye on the data for people who depart at the end of the first year? Is it changing and do you have plans to target that moment in time particularly?

Mr Robin Walker: We keep a close eye on the data. I do not have them to hand, so I cannot give you that. One of the important changes here is the shift from NQTs, as they used to be called, to early career teachers and the two-year programme of mentoring and support that we have with the early career framework. This is the first year that we have been doing that. That is designed to provide more support to teachers at the early stages, exactly because of the issues you raise about the level of concern around dropping out. We will all come across anecdotal experiences of teachers who are newly qualified being plonked in front of a class and being told to get on with it, which is not good for the pupils or the teachers.

It is right that we try to make sure that we have mentoring and support that goes on beyond the first year and starts a journey of CPD. That is what the early career framework has been designed to do. Obviously, we will not have the results of that for retention for some time to come. It is an important policy intervention that I cannot take much credit for because it was my predecessor, Nick Gibb, who very much pulled it together, but it is something that I am very pleased to be in the process of delivering. I think that can make a real difference to exactly that issue.

The other part of it is making sure that schools understand—and we all know that schools have been under enormous pressures with Covid and with high levels of staff absence—the need to support teachers in early career. That is also one of the reasons why we have been working with the unions on the charter on staff wellbeing and on the workload reduction toolkit, to make sure that some of the things where there are pressures on those newest teachers are being addressed.

Overall, I have to say—and partly this has probably been affected by the pandemic, let us be honest—that retention rates have been improving over the last few years. Interestingly, setting the pandemic to one side, because that clearly has had a perverse impact on movement, they were improving during the period from 2016 to 2019 also. While there are undoubtedly huge challenges in this space and undoubtedly we need to retain more of the teachers we train, there has been a gradual improvement in that respect and it is important that we can keep that trend going. As I say, I think the department came to the realisation some years ago that retention is important for the overall teacher workforce and for quality. You want teachers developing that experience and being able to keep delivering it to pupils. It is a double win if you get the retention element right.

Lord Bichard: The strategy that you are adopting ought, if it is going to work, to produce results fairly quickly. From what you are saying, do you agree that it is important to keep the data and the trend and publish that so that either you can adapt the strategy or—

Mr Robin Walker: Absolutely, and something that Nadhim is very keen on as Secretary of State is that he constantly says to us, “Data are our friend in this process. We need to make sure that we are analysing them all.” I think there will always be debate about what data shows what and so on. It is important that we have the focus on how to retain high-quality teachers.

The other element that is important is making sure that the evidence base is consistent from initial teacher training through the early career framework and on into the career. I think that the creation of the Education Endowment Foundation was important to make sure that there is a “what works” evidence base that everyone can work to. Coming back to the White Paper, I was pleased that we were able to get the re-endowment of that so that it can continue with its work. We found that it is a trusted source across the profession, where there are plenty of controversies about the way to do things but the EEF is broadly respected.

Q86 **Baroness Sater:** The National Foundation for Educational Research has reported that there is a substantial risk that recruitment targets will be missed across the range of subjects this year. You have touched on some of the reasons this afternoon, and also about some of the things that you are doing at the moment, but if this is going to happen, what would be your immediate attention and priority to try to deal with this? In other words, you have a lot of things that you are doing at the moment, but

what would be your immediate priority?

Mr Robin Walker: The priority has been for a number of years, and quite rightly so, making sure that we have the teachers in EBacc subjects, the key subjects that we want schools to be able to take, so that children can progress in those spaces. There is a mixed picture in that space. If we look at previous years within EBacc, recruitment exceeded the postgraduate ITT targets in history, English, biology, chemistry and the classics, but it missed it in maths, geography, modern foreign languages, computing and physics.

One of the immediate levers we have to try to address that is bursaries. When I took the decision on bursaries early this year, that latter list is the list of subjects that we have targeted with additional bursaries to make sure that we have an extra incentive for people to come into those areas. When we publish the postgraduate ITT figures for this year, we will be able to see how effectively that has worked and it is an ongoing process.

On the conclusion of the NFER that there is a substantial risk that it will be missed across a range of subjects, that is true and has always been true. I will not attempt to deny that. That is partly why we have the system of bursaries and scholarships to try to address that and move things in the right direction. It is partly why we have the teacher workforce model that allows us to look at that cumulative deficit that we have in some areas and surplus in others. One of the things that we have looked at is where we might have a surplus of chemistry or biology teachers at the moment in our recruitment, how we can direct them or encourage them to look at whether they can train in physics and more broadly to deliver on the sciences. I think there are opportunities through the system to look at that.

The other big long-term challenge that we have with the demographic shift is that we have been for some time overrecruiting for primary, and it is persuading some of those people to consider whether they might want to move on to specialist courses to be able to teach secondary as well. That is certainly the direction of travel of the overall demographics. We do invest in this.

One of the long-term challenges in this respect has been physics and we are just launching a programme that is looking at the engineering space to say, "How can we attract people from engineering to teach physics?" That is a pilot that we are looking at to meet that specific need and how we can perhaps recruit people from a different background to that which we have done previously.

Every year we will look to refresh and to target our marketing campaign and our bursaries in this respect. As I say, that prioritisation will start with the EBacc subjects but also look at other subjects where we might have a particular shortage, and that will change from year to year. It is one of the reasons why we must have a dynamic model.

Baroness Sater: You have touched on some of the skills gaps that you

have in some of the subjects. How will you approach the recruiting in schools in the left-behind areas?

Mr Robin Walker: This is where I think the levelling-up premium becomes important. It is about saying that we want to provide extra support to those areas. We want to provide extra support not just in recruiting but also in retention, so it is about having a multiyear programme of support. Without going into too much detail on things that we have not yet announced—I will be a little bit careful—we have said that that will be up to £3,000 per year for teachers in target subjects in those education investment areas and what we newly announced with the White Paper, priority education investment areas. Those include some of the areas that we previously had as opportunity areas for the department and some of the areas that are educationally underperforming at key stage 2 and key stage 4, but also supplemented by a look at the percentage of pupil premium. It is a combination of deprivation factors and underperformance that has led to the selection of those areas and they will be the highest areas for the levelling-up premium.

One of the things that we are considering at the moment carefully is how we also target schools that might not be in EIAs or priority EIAs but have particularly high levels of students on pupil premium. I think it is right to look at both, but the £3,000 at the top of the package will be for those target areas, the so-called left-behind areas, to make sure that they get that support.

The other piece here, of course, is the broader picture around fairer funding. I can talk about fairer funding until I am blue in the face; it is what I spent most of my parliamentary career talking about and I only happen to be the Minister responsible for delivering it. Making sure that we get money to schools according to who they serve, rather than where they happen to be in the country, is fundamentally the right thing to do and that is why the NFF reforms we are in the process of delivering are so important.

Q87 **Baroness Pinnock:** Good afternoon. I have to say that I am a secondary school governor, have been for a lot of years, and so understand some of the issues within the school I serve, in particular.

The question I have is about retention and you have talked quite a lot about that already. However, the NEU has said that 44% of state school teachers will leave the profession by 2027. I appreciate that will include retirees. Also, we have the statistics from the Education Policy Institute that one in five leave after two years, four in 10 after five years, and so on. There is a big challenge for retention. I think that you have already said that retention is important in the students' education for quality, continuity, less disruption and so on, and retaining the best teachers that you can. What are you going to do about it?

Mr Robin Walker: It is a fair challenge.

Baroness Pinnock: I know that it is a long-term thing so you cannot click your fingers and it will happen overnight. The Government have had

10 years at this so far, so can you tell me what progress has been made?

Mr Robin Walker: Let me talk through this in a bit of detail, because it is important. As I say, culturally I think the department realised this some years ago and there was a shift from something that had previously been very much a recruitment strategy to being a recruitment and retention strategy. I think that is welcome, because it is very important in that respect.

The 44% figure is a matter for debate. To give an illustration of that, the proportion of teachers who leave the profession is often much less than the proportion who might say they are considering it in a survey. I have an example of this. There was an NFER report that, in a survey of secondary teachers in July 2019, 30% said they were considering leaving within the next year and 16% said that they had a destination in mind and had decided to leave. In reality, what we saw in the rates for that year was 9.4% in 2018-19 and 7.8% in 2019-20, the following year. Sometimes the stated intention is different from the outcome.

The wastage rate, if you take out retirement for qualified teachers, has gone down each year since 2016, which I think reflects also the shift by the department to a retention policy as well as a recruitment one. The latest leaver rate, which includes retirements, is at the lowest level since we began collecting data in 2010. I think that that has been partly impacted by the pandemic over the last couple of years, so we need to absolutely keep a focus on this.

We look at forecast leaver rates within our teacher workforce at planning and target setting, and that is partly why the figures are as high as they are, but we reflect what we need to look at to replace. There is a number of things and actions that we are taking to try to address retention. I already have touched on the ECF and that approach, but we set up an expert advisory group on wellbeing and we have worked with the NEU, among others, on the education staff wellbeing charter, something that I was able to agree with our friends at the NEU to talk about at the ISTP last year and I am looking forward to engaging on that in the weeks to come. About 1,600 schools have signed up to that since it was launched in November 2021. There is a mental health and wellbeing support package for school leaders, which is promoting one-to-one counselling and peer support for around 2,000 school leaders, and the senior mental health lead training grant, which is about mental health support both to staff and to pupils in schools.

We are also, as a department, doing a lot of work in promoting flexible working and this is also one of the long-term levers that we have on retention. I have come across some interesting examples of teachers doing job shares and school leaders even doing job shares effectively. I would like to see more of that and this being a profession that is recognised as supporting that type of flexible working. Particularly if you look at the primary teaching workforce, which is very heavily dominated by women and particularly young women, there is an obvious drain on that when people leave to have children. Having flexibility and

opportunities for people to come back or to stay on is important in that respect.

One other aspect that I think is important to retention and perhaps does not always get the attention it deserves is behaviour. If you survey teachers as to why they are leaving the profession, one of the reasons that is often given is concerns about behaviour and difficulties with managing behaviour. Some of the work that we have been doing with our behaviour hubs for creating a positive culture in schools around behaviour can play a quite significant role in the long run in creating a better environment for people to stay and to want to stay in teaching. We are spending about £10 million on those behaviour hubs and much more important than the money is the culture of saying that we want schools to be a positive environment for behaviour, which impacts both pupils and teachers in a positive way. That is another tool that we have for retention.

I totally agree with the importance that this committee is placing on retention. While we will always have arguments with our friends in the various education unions about some of the figures, I think we recognise that retention is something that we have to keep a big focus on.

Baroness Pinnock: Thank you very much for that detailed answer. One of the things that rather concerns me is that 44% of teachers are thinking about leaving the profession, which rather indicates that they are not completely happy in their role, in their job, in their profession. The fact that they do not manage to leave is a different issue.

Mr Robin Walker: Yes, but it does affect retention.

Baroness Pinnock: No, I think there is a concern there. I think it was the EPI again who listed one of the biggest issues, which you have not mentioned, of workloads. As a school governor, I know that is the biggest stress factor on teachers.

Mr Robin Walker: I agree that workload is hugely important. One of the things that came out of the first retention strategy that the department drafted was the workload reduction toolkit, which we publish. We work with schools and with leaders to promote some of the areas where we can find ways of reducing unnecessary workload and making sure that teachers can spend their time focusing on what they want to be doing, which is teaching, and there is ongoing work on that. I think I am right in saying—officials can correct me if I am wrong—that before the pandemic some good figures around the deployment of that showed it had an impact of up to about five hours of unnecessary workload being removed. They can correct me if I am wrong because I am not delving into the right bit of my pack.

Clearly, the pandemic has put enormous pressures on the teaching workforce and we all recognise that teachers have gone above and beyond to meet that. A very important point that we want to make sure of now is that, as we return to a greater degree of normality, we can get

back to continuing to address workload and make sure that teachers are being supported in the right way.

We have also seen schools that have managed that effectively. An opportunity in all schools belonging to a family of schools is for there to be greater support from the system and for some of the multi-academy trusts being able to have some quite innovative approaches to deploying staff across schools where necessary to protect the staff who are there from being overwhelmed in their workload.

I appreciate that this is slightly beyond the remit of what you are looking at as a committee, but the challenges we have faced with Covid and staff absence placed particular burdens on the staff who were there and continued to go on. It was important that there was a cross-deployment of support to meet those. We have tried to use our education hub to demonstrate to the system some good examples of what can be done in those situations, which has enabled schools to be open and also helped to manage the workload of the teachers who remained in school. This is absolutely a focus for us.

Also, the department—understandably during the course of the pandemic—sometimes had to rush out guidance at short notice to address things, but I heard loud and clear the concerns from teachers and head teachers about when that sometimes landed late in the term, just before a holiday or on a Friday. I have tried to address that and made sure that whenever we have made announcements, when we have had any control over the timing, we have done it in a way that fits better with the needs of professionals.

Baroness Pinnock: I could give you some examples, but I will not.

Mr Robin Walker: Yes, I have heard many of them. We have to keep that in mind and we have to keep working on that because I recognise that there were some real challenges in that respect and that we can do better in the future.

Q88 **Lord Bichard:** All power to your elbow on that last point. Have we gone far enough or as far as we can with teaching assistants? When we introduced them—it was not as long ago as 1964—the teaching profession opposed them, whereas the Government at the time saw it as a way of reducing the burden on teachers, taking away some of the non-professional. They are also easier to recruit and probably to retain than fully qualified teachers. Have schools yet gone far enough in making the fullest use of teaching assistants to aid retention?

Mr Robin Walker: I have to be careful what I say here. I should probably declare an interest on the basis that my sister is a teaching assistant. Teaching assistants play a hugely valuable role and support the teaching profession in many respects, but they cannot necessarily do and replicate some things that teachers do.

We do not recruit teaching assistants as part of the workforce in the same way that we recruit teachers. We are responsible for recruiting the

teaching workforce. Individual schools take decisions around teaching assistants and local authorities tend to set their pay scales rather than us. There is a distinction in that respect.

We are keen to support research on the most effective use of teaching assistants, for educational added value and supporting children with special educational needs on the inclusion front and also for the workload challenge and that side of things. Following the research and following the most effective deployment of teaching assistants is important.

The other area that I personally am passionate about is making sure that we have a mechanism and a pipeline through which great teaching assistants who come into the profession because of the added flexibility and so on can move up into teaching if they choose to. That is an important area for us to look at for the future of teaching apprenticeships and the movement forward from schools on that. That is an area of ongoing work.

On your specific question about whether we can deploy more teaching assistants to manage the workload of teachers, individual schools will be taking that decision rather than the Department for Education trying to drive that.

Lord Bichard: That may be so, but you have quite an influence on how schools behave. It does not always seem like that when you are there, I know, but you do. Education research can sometimes take at least 10 years to produce anything. Schools make innovative use of teaching assistants in ways that reduce the workload on fully qualified teachers. Could you possibly short-circuit the research and do some hands-on, best practice work so that you can get out advice to schools on how teaching assistants can be best used?

Mr Robin Walker: I am always very happy to look at examples and make sure that we are being evidence based in our approach. You are right that some educational research is very long-term. Some is able to be done much faster and it is important that we look at both. It is right, though, that my primary responsibility as the Minister for School Standards when it comes to recruitment particularly is around the teaching workforce. It is right that I have to focus on that.

Q89 **Lord Willis of Knaresborough:** Briefly, I was head of Britain's largest secondary school, a comprehensive, quite a while ago, after 1964. Having grandchildren going through the system now, it interests me how little has changed. We are talking about now a technological world where children are born with a chip in them that enables them to be incredibly savvy in all things technology. Yet so much of what we do in our schools does not use that terrific love they have and ability to use technology.

When you talk about workload and professional development, I am incredibly supportive. I very much like what you have been saying to us this afternoon, but I believe that the department is in the dark ages with technology. You have a Secretary of State who, quite frankly, has a real

reputation in this area and yet you have not spoken a word about bringing technology to the fore of the curriculum and the training of teachers as part and parcel of that. Could you briefly say where that lies in your thinking and in the department's thinking?

Mr Robin Walker: It is a fair challenge. Technology can be a huge catalyst for learning. It can be valuable but, as I said earlier, it is not a replacement for what great teachers can bring to the system. It is important that we should look at how we can use digital tools in this process to improve accessibility and quality across the piece. We are very keen to capitalise on the opportunities there. You are right in referring to my Secretary of State's particular interest in this space.

We have seen during the pandemic some of the value of and the uses of but also some of the limitations of technology. The department was involved in getting devices out to children so that they could access education—

Lord Willis of Knaresborough: Excuse me. That actually told us a tale, though. So many schools and so many youngsters did not have access to technology in the 21st century and were having to—

Mr Robin Walker: Actually, a lot of schools had huge access to technology with fixed equipment, IT, computers and so on. During the pandemic we needed something that students could take home that had been appropriately prepared and had the appropriate safety mechanisms. It is right that we have learned lessons from that as to what is needed there with devices. Absolutely, we can take lessons from some aspects of that and help to reduce teacher workload in the future.

When I was talking about the Oak arm's length body, there is an opportunity for how that can help with exemplification, helping teachers prepare lessons and curriculum plans and that side of things, which is one of the big drivers of workload. But we need to be careful. Technology is not a panacea. It will not replace evidence-based pedagogy at any point. It will not create a situation that some might envisage in theory where one teacher can deliver to 300 pupils. That is an unrealistic expectation and we need to make sure we keep a focus on the value of children being in schools, which some of the work that the Children's Commissioner has done has demonstrated.

One of the areas of technology—or perhaps more accurately data—can do a much better job to help us is improve attendance. We are looking carefully at how we can make sure we have better joined-up data on that front to look at that piece as well. There are enormous opportunities in this space.

Schools tell us—and this is both a teaching issue and, beyond the teaching workforce, also something about business management and governing bodies—that they want help with the technical expertise. Time, money and technical expertise are the three things that they say are limitations for them with technology. Through the EIA programme, we

prioritise what you describe as left-behind areas for investment in upgrading wi-fi and connectivity. We are clear that that needs to be done across the whole school estate but we should start with those areas that have the greatest need. We also want to make sure that we look at the opportunities for technology in sharing best practice and driving things forward. There are huge opportunities.

I do not want to give the impression—and there has in the past been a concern among the teaching profession—that technical wizardry will in some way replace the agency of teachers. That is never likely to happen. Philosophically, as a department, we strongly believe that great teachers are the biggest determinant of pupil success. We should be looking at where technology can empower and support teachers rather than in any way reduce their role.

The Chair: You will have noticed Lord Filkin is not on screen but he is on the phone, so we will try to bring him in because he, too, has a question about a digital approach.

Q90 **Lord Filkin:** Good afternoon, Minister. Thank you very much. I am sorry for not being here in person or in face.

To some extent, the last question pre-empted mine and in some ways the Minister has gone quite a way to answering it. But I want to challenge him on it to some extent because he basically said what the teaching unions, the schools and the teachers would all be very happy with, "Steady as you go. Let us have some more help with the technology because it is useful but do not think that the didactic model we have had for several hundred years is not the fundamental one for the next 100 years."

That is, arguably, questionable. It is questionable because we clearly have significant labour shortages across the economy now. If you look at the demographics, many more people will leave the workforce than will enter it over the next decade. We will have persistent labour shortages. For most sectors, this is an incentive towards trying to transform models so that they can get more with less workforce. The shortages in the teaching profession will be where there is demand for those skills in other sectors. Maths, science and information technology will be highly vulnerable. I do not need to tell you that, Minister. You know that inside out.

You have answered my question. It does not sound as if there is any significant work going on in the department to explore how to achieve good education through new models of learning with fewer teachers when we have teacher shortages. Am I correct in that? If so, it is concerning.

Mr Robin Walker: There are a number of parts to answering that question. Of course work is always going on in the department on how to best use technology, but we have tried to focus on how we can demonstrate effective technology that can support schools and teachers in those schools. In 2020, the department rolled out the EdTech Demonstrator Programme, which provides free peer-to-peer training and

advice to state-funded schools on how they can make the best use of technology. Where I perhaps pick up on your last remark is that we have never designed that to be a replacement for teachers and the teaching workforce. It is about empowering them and strengthening their ability to deliver with technology.

I absolutely accept that there are benefits of using digital technologies to reduce workload, not least potentially in marking. We are looking at—over the long run, I hasten to add, not introducing overnight—the role that digital technology can play for exams and qualifications in the future. Other jurisdictions are moving towards that. You will see with our multiplication check that we use digital access for students on that front, which will be the first example of that being used there. We are not averse to using technology where it can make a difference.

Lord Filkin: Exactly. You have re-emphasised the point—and it is valid—that the department is using technology to try to empower and increase the performance of the existing teaching model. But surely there should be some concern in the department that you will not have enough maths, science and IT teachers for every school to have the ones they will need over the next decade. If that is plausible, should you think about how you can have different models that will make better use of the fewer specialists that you have?

Mr Robin Walker: I understand the point, but we also take the view that it is crucially important that we continue to get more maths and science teachers. That is why we have a model that creates the figures that drive the demand for that. We have seen some significant improvements in areas such as chemistry. The maths figures at the last check were heading in the right direction, even though we are not fully meeting our targets. We are targeting support to recruit the right people.

Also, to your point about demographics and about people leaving, we could do more on—and we need to do more on—looking at reaching people later in their careers, rather than looking at teacher recruitment always at the start. We have some great programmes like Teach First, the high-potential initial teacher training approach and so on. I have been discussing with colleagues having more of a “teach last” approach to attract more people who have other life experience and may want to come into teaching towards the end of their careers. In a world in which people undertake more careers and work across more sectors, we need to make sure that the offer of teaching is there for people at all stages in life as well.

Lord Filkin: That is all good. I could not agree more. “Teach last” and persistent efforts to get more scarce skills into the teaching workforce of course need to be done. I suggest, though, that just to assume that will work seems to be rather optimistic. That mind-set would have never led to the creation of the Open University because people would have said, “It has never been done before. That is not the way we do universities.” There is a need for the department to shake up its thinking in this respect to cope with the significant labour supply risk to teaching. That is more of

a comment than a question, but I would be delighted if you said yes, Minister.

The Chair: We will not get anything more out of him on that. Thanks very much.

Q91 **Lord Hunt of Kings Heath:** This is a follow-up question. The Minister of State for Health is coming to the second half of this session. If you were to look at the public sector, take all the different sectors, they all have different workforce challenges. If you add it up, there is no way they will meet the projections of how many they need. Coming back to Geoff's point, do we need to be more realistic? There is no chance that we will meet all the gap. Surely we have to think harder about re-engineering the way we do things. We simply cannot go on saying, "We have this initiative and that initiative." The figures just do not add up in the end.

Mr Robin Walker: In fairness, I will not comment too broadly about the public sector because I have been a Minister in a number of departments but I have been in only one front-line spending department delivering public services, which is this one. Significant system reform is going on in the education space and the evolution we have seen of, first of all, academies and then multi-academy trusts has pushed in the direction of looking at how the resource can be deployed most effectively within the piece. There is real opportunity in deploying the expertise and the resource that is there. There are opportunities in digital.

But if you ask me whether I believe we will move away from a situation in which the key determinant of success in education is teachers, I do not. We need, therefore, to keep recruiting and targeting the right expertise and building the evidence base for what works most effectively in pedagogy and teaching. For the bit that I am responsible for, it is right to keep a focus on the people and how we attract the right people.

As part of that, some of the levers do have to change. That is why, as I say, the decision we have taken on starting salaries is significant. We are part way through the School Teachers' Review Body process and I cannot pre-empt the outcome of that, but if we were to go ahead with what we propose on that front, it is a 12% increase in starting salaries over two years. That significant increase makes this area of the workforce significantly more competitive in a clearly competitive market. That is where we need to keep a focus.

But absolutely, for some of the other things we have touched on—whether it is digital, the role of teaching assistants or the shape of the system and how it can deliver—we need to look at what can be most effectively done. Also, Nadhim would say if he were here that the schools bit is one part of his portfolio, which is schools, skills and families. The skills space, of course, has huge opportunity for innovative approaches and pulling people through. The example given of the Open University is interesting for the opportunities there.

Also, we should be careful of thinking that technological panaceas will turn around the system. We should be careful of thinking as well, when we look at the public sector as a whole, that one part of it is the same as another part. Looking at the education space that I deal with and talking to my colleagues who deal with early years, with children's services and so on, which our department has responsibility for but we do not recruit the workforce for in the same way as we do with teaching, I recognise distinct challenges in each of those. It is a complicated picture.

There is an opportunity for clearly more joined-up working—and perhaps a point you can discuss with my friend and colleague in the health department—in how we support mental health. There is undoubtedly a huge job to do in supporting mental health in schools and a huge job to do in the health space. Joining up and making sure that the two work together as effectively as possible is an ongoing challenge that everyone is realising has further to go.

The Chair: But the problem with what you have just said is that at the end of the day, the children are the same children that each of these different organisations is working with. The children need a co-ordinated and logical response that integrates the three, but we do not have time for that now. I will move on to Lord Porter.

Mr Robin Walker: I wholly agree with what you have just said.

Q92 **Lord Porter of Spalding:** We are all in that same space. The state wastes a fortune intervening with children's mental health far too late in their problems. You would save a lot of money and a lot of extra resources put in later. That would be good.

We are staying off the limits of paying people more money, because that is the easy answer to fix the public service. You just print a load more pound notes and throw them out at people and then they will come and work for you. Obviously that will not happen, but have we looked at trying to get special tax breaks for people to go into teaching? I find it bizarre as a country that on most of our taxation fronts the Treasury will write the schools a cheque so the schools can write the teachers a cheque so the teachers can write the Treasury a cheque. If you had a way of cutting out the middleman, we would have more resources to give to people to do the thing we want them to do, which is the teaching bit.

Mr Robin Walker: It is an interesting point. I have to say I am not sure my friends at the Treasury would thank me if I said, "Yes, that is a brilliant idea. Let us do it immediately across the piece." An example perhaps of that is when we have the bursaries to attract people into certain areas. Those are designed as tax-free bursaries. The levelling-up premium of £3,000 which people will get for working in a disadvantaged area is tax free and that has been negotiated and agreed with our friends at the Treasury in advance. To some extent, some of the targeted interventions we make take that into account.

Also, we talked about, for instance, teaching assistants and that workforce. Some of the moves we have made to raise the thresholds on

both income tax and national insurance are important in making sure that some of those lower-paid public sector jobs pay less in tax over time.

On the broad point—and I wholly agree with you about earlier intervention on mental health—I am not sure the Treasury would thank us if we wanted to overcomplicate the tax system by having specific tax systems for specific professions. I doubt they will let us get away with that, but we should look at where there are already opportunities not to create perverse disincentives for people. Absolutely, where we target extra support, we should make sure that that then does not get taken away with the other hand. The levelling-up premium is a good example of where that has been thought through.

The Chair: Thank you. Lord Bichard, you wanted to come in again.

Lord Bichard: You are running out of time, Chair.

The Chair: It is all right. The next person has not arrived.

Q93 **Lord Bichard:** I want to underline briefly the points that Lord Filkin and Lord Hunt made. No one suggests that digital is a panacea. No one suggests that you should break the bond between teacher and pupil, but we suggest that maybe we could think a little bit more creatively about the teaching function and look at whether in parts of that process digital could make a bigger contribution.

I go back to the point about teaching assistants. When we tried to introduce teaching assistants—and it was only 20 years or so ago—the teaching profession said clearly, “You cannot break down the teaching activity. We do it all or we do nothing.” Similar words were uttered when I was running a university, “You cannot bring in a brilliant professor from the States to talk about something because you will break the bond”; you can and they are.

The three of us are asking if we could be a bit more creative in looking at the process of teaching to ensure that we apply technology in particular.

Mr Robin Walker: Yes, that is absolutely a fair challenge and I very much take that on board. Part of the stuff we have done through the workload reduction toolkit points in that direction. Also, I gave the example earlier of the Oak ALB in the specific area of curriculum planning and lesson development. That offers some opportunities to use technology to reduce workload and maximise the impact of the workforce being available in that space. There are some opportunities in that space. I know I will be constantly challenged by my Secretary of State to make sure that we take the opportunities that sit in the digital space.

I do not want to give the impression, because it is not realistic, that that would mean that we can stop worrying about recruiting enough teachers and getting sufficiency in key areas. It is important to strike that balance. But absolutely, your challenge is fair and I will take it away with me and make sure I reflect it in my discussions with officials.

The Chair: Indeed, some of our organisations had to come up with, as

you said earlier, some creative ways of delivering education, particularly to the older pupils, during lockdown. I know, for example, that the University of London has now done international work, which it was not anywhere near before the pandemic. Now it is making much more money from selling its products abroad. We have been at the forefront of that list and we need to reflect that for our schools.

Mr Robin Walker: Our education sector more broadly is, of course, a huge net exporter for our country. We should welcome and support that.

The Chair: Yes. Maybe in Lord Willis's initial question he was asking whether you would look at some of this for teacher education and not just pupil education. There are huge opportunities there. Anyway, we cannot do your job. You have to do your job. We have to keep asking you questions and challenging you. We will continue to do that. Thank you enormously for coming and sharing your time with us. I was talking about the Warnock report and the first educational priority areas, which were in the 1960s. However, it is now time to finish this half of the session. Thank you.

Q94 **Lord Davies of Gower:** Did you not want me to ask my question, Chair?

The Chair: I did not know you had one. I am sorry. I had not turned my page.

Lord Davies of Gower: You need new technology.

The Chair: Can we ask that we put that to the Minister in writing? I am sorry, Byron. It is my fault entirely.

Lord Davies of Gower: No need to apologise, Chair. It is okay.

The Chair: I was so anxious about getting people in on the phone and all the rest of it. I am sorry. Okay. We now have to formally end this part of the session. Thank you.