



## Education Committee

### Oral evidence: [Accountability hearings](#), HC 58

Wednesday 7 December 2022

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Members present: Robin Walker (Chair); Caroline Ansell; Miriam Cates; Mrs Flick Drummond; Anna Firth; Nick Fletcher; Andrew Lewer and Ian Mearns.

Questions 223 - 311

#### Witnesses

**I:** Gillian Keegan MP, Secretary of State, Department for Education and Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Gillian Keegan and Susan Acland-Hood.

Q223 **Chair:** Welcome to this accountability hearing for the Secretary of State for Education. I am delighted to welcome Gillian Keegan as Secretary of State and Susan Acland-Hood as Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education.

Secretary of State, where does education policy currently sit within the Government's top priorities, and what are your top priorities as Secretary of State for Education?

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, thank you, and it is great to be back. Many of you I know were on the Committee last time when I was here as Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills. Congratulations to you, Robin, and everyone who has been in place since then.

It is fair to say all of us would think that it is pretty high on the Government's agenda and on the Prime Minister's agenda: as he said, the closest thing to a silver bullet that we have is education. Everyone around the table would agree with that. The other part of where we always look as politicians is where the investment is going. It is clear from the Autumn Statement that there has been significant uplift, and we are very thankful to the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Treasury for making sure that education is well funded. It is a very high priority.

Q224 **Chair:** And your priorities?

**Gillian Keegan:** Clearly, this is a dream job for me. Most of you who know me know that I am very passionate about apprenticeships, so that is clearly one thing. There is barely a question that is raised that I cannot come up with apprenticeships being a good answer to. In general, levelling-up and what we have all talked about, which is the fact that talent is everywhere but opportunity is not, is not academic to me. That is my lived experience for my whole life. I truly believe it. I truly believe there is a lot of talent in this country that is not getting the opportunity it deserves. There are still a lot of children—not as many as there were, we are improving all the time—that are not getting the best start in life through their early years, the best school opportunity and options they could have, or the best advice to get on in life, either through further education or further studies through to university. When I was in the Apprenticeship and Skills Minister role, we always focused on making sure that the other 50% had a really great option as well. We started that journey, but we have to continue that journey.

In terms of where we are, Claire Coutinho is going to be looking at early years and special education needs and children and family, and that is an area where we have done less reform. We still have a lot of the reform in front of us in that area, and we will be issuing our plans and responding to various consultations in the New Year, but that is something that I know you will have more questions on.



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School standards: Nick Gibbs is back. Phonics: expect lots. He has added maths hubs and foreign languages, so real focus on standards and increasing those standards. You may have seen that we had a very stretching target for Key Stage 2—90% of kids—and that is to force us to continually look to improve the standards.

In terms of technical education, apprenticeships and skills, the Skills Bill is now an Act. It was the White Paper when I was there, and it was just going through the Lords when I was moved into Health. That is now there, and we have the investment and the money. It is to scale that, so that those opportunities are real. If you are sat there, as I was in Knowsley, and you are looking for a fabulous apprenticeship or a great course to go on, or later in life looking to upgrade your skills or get into a new opportunity, you can find the things that we are working on delivering.

**Chair:** That is good to hear. This Committee is taking an interest in some of those areas you mentioned, particularly some of the areas that Claire will be leading on. We will come back to some of those later in brief, but I want to bring in Caroline at this point on the issue of priorities.

Q225 **Caroline Ansell:** Thank you very much. You signposted my question there when you referenced children and families. The Children's Commissioner, who herself was an educator for 30 years and more, said there is only one thing as powerful or potentially more than a good education, and that was family. I wonder if you could, even at this early stage, outline some of the potential reforms and discussions that might be forthcoming.

**Gillian Keegan:** There is a lot in that. There is a lot of work. We will all be aware of the work that Dame Andrea Leadsom has done on the family hubs, which is very important to give that support to get the best start in life. I visited some of the early work there with perinatal mental health support for families in Knowsley, actually, where I am from. I visited that when I was a Health Minister. That is an important part to make sure that families are supported and that support is universal.

One of the things that we have got wrong in the past is we tried to focus things on targeted people who do not want to be targeted, quite frankly. Everybody needs a bit of help and different help at different times of their life, so it is to make sure that is a universal service. That is going to be a fantastic addition, just to help make sure that kids are developing well when they are born and when they are young.

Clearly, the thing that we have to look at is childcare. We know that childcare is very expensive for younger children. We have been looking with interest at a lot of the work that has been going on. I know Onward and others have published reports. Claire is going to be looking at childcare. We spend a lot of money on childcare, actually. We spent £20 billion in the last five years, so there is a lot of investment, DfE alone



spends £3.5 billion a year, but of course, you always want to make sure that you are providing the right service for families.

Then it is making sure that we support families as much as we possibly can. A lot of the things that we have done are there to support families and make sure that you have great options for school. The good and outstanding school is really important. When your precious charge goes off aged four or five, you want to make sure that they are going to get a fantastic experience at school. It is quite a worrying time for parents and for kids as well. It is critical that most people get that option for good and outstanding schools.

Q226 **Chair:** Thank you. In terms of the portfolios within the Department, we have gone from a situation in which we used to have a Universities Minister at the Cabinet table, to one in which you had a dedicated Minister for Universities in the Department, to one in which we now have a Minister for Higher and Further Education. Does that reflect a change in the priorities or the importance of the universities sector to the Department?

**Gillian Keegan:** Definitely not. We are very proud of our university sector, our researchers, and four of our universities are in the top 10 in the world. I was very briefly in the Foreign Office. If you go around and speak to anybody, they will talk about our education system, which our universities are the pinnacle of, and how well-regarded and well-respected it is globally. It is a big part of our soft power. It is a big part of our economy. It is a big part of something we are all proud of. I have a university in my constituency. If you have a university in your constituency, we are proud of what they do every day to help people get on and be the best they can be in life and get the vital skills they need. So not at all, but we have one less Minister than when I was there. There was another Minister.

What we are really looking at are cohorts. For 16 and above, you have all of these different options. We want all of these different options to be fantastic and to work well together, work better together. One of the things we have introduced is the Institutes for Technology, of which there are 21. If you have not been to one of them, I would suggest you go to some of them, because they are leading in key and critical new skills areas. The collaboration between universities, FE colleges and business is where there is a lot more effort being made.

Q227 **Chair:** Do you believe there is more scope for that collaboration and possibly for institutional combinations between HE and FE?

**Gillian Keegan:** I think so. I am not hung up on the structures but working together to solve some of the business issues. I was at one recently, which was focused on advanced manufacturing. If you think about our journey—manufacturing as part of our culture and history—we lost a lot of our manufacturing because of labour arbitrage. We could not compete with cheaper labour in the far east. Actually, in advanced



manufacturing there is hardly any labour. It is all robotics. That gives us huge opportunity, but we need to have the people with the skills to be able to programme equipment, to be able to maintain it and to be able to optimise it, etc, so working together with businesses to make sure that we create the skills that can support those real growth opportunities for our businesses. You will see that around the West Midlands which is becoming a real hub for that as well as digital, largely down to Andy Street's leadership as well. There is a lot of work going on, and collaborations between the interested parties is absolutely the way to go.

**Q228 Chair:** With our university sector, you have mentioned yourself the soft power, the economic impact and that side of things. That is of course supported by international students. I remember very well, because I was at the Department at the time, celebrating the achievement of the target for international students early. We have had some reporting recently that the Government may wish to curtail those numbers or in some way return to only hitting the target of 600,000 rather than necessarily exceeding it. The university sector would appear to be very keen to keep going up and attracting more talented students from around the world. Where does the DfE sit on this, and what conversations are you having within Government about international students?

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, thank you for all the work you did, because I was really pleased to see that there was an international education strategy, that it had been thought about, it had been deliberately focused on, and it had a target in there which was for in 10 years' time, one of the targets that has been brought forward in terms of achievements. It is a huge economic contributor as well to the areas around a university but also to the country. I am very proud that we have an international education strategy. It is a very strategic thing to do, because international education is very important.

What we are doing now is making sure that we work with universities to focus on how we can expand and grow still, but maybe expand the breadth of countries that are benefiting from that opportunity. I guess you cannot believe everything you read in the papers. I do not know if everything was sourced, but we are proud to have that.

There is often a discussion about the numbers and whether student numbers should be in or out of the numbers. The reality is we started with them in, so that is why they are in. Clearly, when we are looking at the challenge of migration, which I am not underestimating, we do have huge issues. The small boats is something that concerns many of us and our constituents, but you really have to separate that from people who are coming here to do degrees, a lot of them doing STEM degrees as well.

**Q229 Chair:** I have had a lot of concerns raised with me over the years about uncontrolled migration, about the issue of small boats and so on. I have never had any concerns raised about PhD students or postgraduates.

**Gillian Keegan:** No, and a lot are masters and PhD students.



Q230 **Ian Mearns:** Some of the press speculation, shall we call it, has referred to some sort of differentiation in some people's thinking between Russell Group universities and the students they attract and other universities, inasmuch as that would then seem to imply in some people's minds that the product of other universities outside the Russell Group is somehow inferior and therefore not worthy of attracting international students to them. That would be hugely detrimental, certainly to universities in the north-east of England, who have a very good product and are producing good students with good quality degrees. I do hope you can put on the record, Secretary of State, that this is definitely not in the thinking of the DfE or other colleagues around the Cabinet table.

**Gillian Keegan:** I am very happy to put that on the record. However, what I will say is the assurance that we seek to have good quality degrees and education is continual. It is a very expensive decision for international students, even more expensive than for our own students, but it is a big investment going to university, and you need to make sure that you get the quality. That is for every student to make sure that we have very good quality courses and continually make sure that they are meeting the needs of business and employers.

Q231 **Mrs Drummond:** Going back to newspaper reports about medical colleges and that they are only taking on foreign students, is that the case, or do you have plans, because we have a shortage of doctors and medical students, to make sure that British students will be taken on by the new colleges?

**Gillian Keegan:** We are investing in medical schools. In fact, I opened a nurse and allied health building in my own university about four weeks ago. We are investing in more and more medical places. We know there is a challenge with medical places. There is some work, I believe, on considering whether we could do degree, master's degree, higher level apprenticeships also to facilitate more routes. There are about 70 today, including doctors as well. I do not know if we have anything specific on the numbers in terms of medical places. I know there is a cap on some of the numbers.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** There is an overall cap on the number of medical places we fund. It is true that there are some international students in medical places, but it is certainly not true that they are excessively dominant.

Q232 **Mrs Drummond:** These new medical colleges that are set up apparently had 100% foreign students.

**Chair:** Brunel in particular is the one at the moment, which is—

**Mrs Drummond:** Brunel, exactly. I wanted some confirmation from you that you are looking at that.

**Gillian Keegan:** Let me take that away and look specifically at that university. There should not be a school that has 100%. It sounds a bit



excessive, but when you are starting up you have this issue of which students you attract first, and there is probably a financial difference as well, which we are all aware of.

**Q233 Chair:** Secretary of State, if I may on that—I have to declare a constituency interest, because my university is one of those which is affected by this—it is a DHSC process allocating new medical places which is the challenge here. Perhaps we could ask you to speak to your colleagues and former colleagues at the DHSC and urge them to ensure that there are places allocated to those medical schools which have been approved. There are three, Worcester, Brunel and Chester, where there are new medical schools which do not yet have any funded places. There was process of allocating places which was due to be run but was postponed as a result of Covid, which could be the solution to this problem. It is, I suspect, more of a Health problem than an Education one, from my understanding of the issue.

**Gillian Keegan:** There is a bit more on the placements as opposed to the university course as well, trying to make sure that they align. I remember that from Health. We are doing a lot of work by the way—as you would expect, I have not long come from Health—to make sure that we optimise the routes to make sure that we have the staff that we need, and we have a lot of apprenticeship routes, so we will be working very closely on that.

**Q234 Nick Fletcher:** In immigration with regards to students, it was reported that international students that are studying masters are bringing family members over. Can you confirm that? Can you discuss what you are going to do about that? If they were coming over for a PhD, people were a little bit more in agreeance with that, but when they were just studying a masters and they were bringing their family over, and with the issues that we have with immigration, it was causing concern with many constituents of mine.

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, the vast majority of international students are probably undergraduates not postgraduates. The exception in terms of being able to bring a family member over is you have to be able to fund your family members as well, so there are conditions attached to it. As you say, it is only for masters and PhD students. It tends to be for people who come from particular parts of the world, more mature students as well, because obviously most young people do not have an awful lot of dependants, and they have to be immediate dependants.

Immigration is a Home Office lead. It is not a Department for Education lead. We will always work with the Home Office to make sure that we are getting the systems right, but if you look at international students and that 605,000, there is probably a very small number who have brought over dependants.

**Q235 Nick Fletcher:** Will you have a word with the Home Office? Will you discuss it with the Home Office, because it is an issue? Everybody who



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has come into this country at this moment, even if they fund themselves, like you have said, is still another strain on society and on the public purse, whether that is with GP appointments, whether that is with hospitals or whether that is with any other issue.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** They actually pay to use the NHS as well. The student has to demonstrate that they can support their family, and the family pay to use the NHS. Also we know that they go home at the end of the period of study. This is when we have to think really carefully about imbalance, because this is part of our international student visa offer and it is very similar to what our competitors around the world will offer. If we make changes to it, we need to accept that means our ability to attract the best students from around the world is going to be reduced.

The other thing that is worth thinking about is what the Secretary of State said about trying to make sure that as we look to attract more international students we are attracting them from a wider range of countries. I say this without a value judgment, but if you look at the places where students are most ready to come without the ability to bring dependants, it is China. The ability to bring dependants is also something that helps us to make sure we are able to attract the best international students from all around the world and that our institutions are not overdependent on single places.

Q236 **Anna Firth:** While we are on the theme of priorities and about grammar schools, I was very pleased to hear your comments about levelling-up opportunity around the country, Secretary of State. It is often said that grammar schools are one of the best engines of mobility ever created. Four of the best grammar schools in the country are in the new city of Southend. Three of those fall within Southend West, Westcliff High School for Girls, Westcliff High School for Boys and Southend High School for Boys. Are they safe in your hands?

**Gillian Keegan:** They are definitely safe in my hands. They do a fantastic job. I was expecting that question to come from Andrew who has a great interest in grammar schools as well. Clearly, they are a great addition to our overall offer, but the thing to remember is 93% of kids will never get to go to a grammar school. In Knowsley, there is not a grammar school within sight. There is not one in Chichester, my own constituency. There are some parts of the country where you are very well served. Southend West is one of those, and I know other areas of Kent and Buckinghamshire in particular tend to have quite a lot of grammar schools, but the vast majority do not get to go to grammar schools, which is why we need to focus on making sure that everybody has a fantastic comprehensive state school education. Of course, we have the academies as well, which is a new addition to the landscape. They are safe in our hands, but they are not the answer for the vast majority of children, because they are not there for the vast majority of children.

Q237 **Chair:** I will bring Andrew in shortly on this, but connected to that we have heard rumours, and fairly widespread rumours, that the Schools Bill





is no longer likely to progress. Is that the case? If so, can you explain why?

**Gillian Keegan:** I can confirm that the Schools Bill will not progress in the third session. There have been a lot of things that we have had to focus on, and the need to provide economic stability and tackle the cost of living means that the parliamentary time has definitely been reprioritised on that. We all know that we had to do that because of the pandemic aftershocks but also the war in Ukraine, and we needed to support families. However, we do remain committed to the very many important objectives that underpinned the Bill, and we will be prioritising some aspects of the Bill as well to see what we can do.

A lot of the Schools White Paper is being implemented and did not require legislation in many cases, but we know that there has been interest, particularly in a couple of areas around legislating for children not in school and a register. I know that has been something the Committee has been pushing. Let us just say, we have heard your concerns and it is definitely a priority.

**Chair:** I am glad to hear that it is a priority. That is something that the Committee has been pushing for, long before my time as Chairman. Indeed, I gave similar assurances during my time as Schools Minister, so it is something that we would see as urgent. It would be welcome to understand what legislative vehicle might be able to deliver that.

Q238 **Andrew Lewer:** Given the invitation to elaborate on grammar schools, I will take it up. Your colleague, Baroness Barran in the Lords, said on Friday, "We have no plans to open new grammar schools." Your comment about there not being one in Knowsley or Chichester is quite pertinent, because under this announcement, in some contrast to the Prime Minister's campaign pledges when he was running for the leadership and the previous Prime Minister's intention, there will not ever be a grammar school in Knowsley or Chichester. When Baroness Barran says there are no plans, does that mean there are no plans in this Session or in this Parliament, or for as long as you will be Education Secretary?

**Gillian Keegan:** They may not be all the same time period either, but no plans usually is within a Session. The key thing is that for decades, 50, 60 years, anyone could have put a grammar school anywhere, and they did not put one in Knowsley. What we have done now is focused on what we are going to do to improve the quality of the schools in places like Knowsley, where they have not been great; they were certainly not great when I was there and they are not fantastic now.

This matters, because a lot of my cousins' kids go to these schools. It is not just my own personal journey. People are experiencing that all time, so that has been a real focus on what can we do best to get more children going to good and outstanding schools. The main part of the strategy has been the academy system, whether that is the multi-academies or the single academies that have been a bigger part of trying



to improve the outcomes. They have made a massive difference in providing that autonomy, investment in leadership, investment in teaching and enabling schools to work together in a much more collaborative way.

That is the structure that we think is going to make the biggest difference to the most amount of children the quickest, and it has. We have been working on this since 2010, when the Conservatives came into Government in a coalition, and then when we took over it was 68% of children were going to a good or outstanding school. It is now 88%. That is the quickest and biggest impact that we can have, so that is where the strategy is focused. However, we know the law facilitates the expansion of existing grammar schools, which is what we have today, which I know you would want to go further, but that is our focus in terms of making sure we make the biggest difference to the most people as quickly as possible.

**Q239 Andrew Lewer:** You talk about various different kinds of schools and how that helps with the mix, and yet this particular kind of school and academic selection, rather than some of the other variety that is available, still seems to be not available. People do not want it to be available in the Department. Given that diversity should provide strength, to coin a phrase, why be so prescriptive about this, and why not allow this to be part of this mix that you are rightly saying is adding so much to the benefits? Is there not an inherent conflict in all Education Ministers of my acquaintance over the years, who always say how great grammar schools are and then say they do not want any more at the same time?

**Gillian Keegan:** I honestly do not have any strong views on grammar schools, but I do have a strong view on the 93% of children that will never get to go to one. Even if you had more—that might be 92% or 91%—it is still a huge percentage of children that we need to make sure have a fantastic education. What is the best way of doing that? We think the academisation and the multi-academy trust is a fantastic model. It is not perfect, by the way, so we need to work on getting that right. There is only so much you can do. There is only so much you can legislate on. There is only so much you can think, in terms of leading the strategy, this is going to make the biggest difference.

We talked about the engine of social mobility. A fact which I would challenge on grammar schools—I think they are fantastic and I am sure everybody wants to go to the ones in Southend—is, the percentage of disadvantaged children in grammar schools does remain stubbornly low. If we use the 2022-23 data, it stood at only 7.9% compared with 26.6% in all mainstream schools.

As an engine for social mobility, I do not know what they were like years ago, but I know that for many of our colleagues it was their life chance. They absolutely love the fact that they were able to go to a grammar school, but I would imagine that the figures were different then. They have become much smaller as a contribution to that social mobility to



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help disadvantaged kids. That is what we are always focused on. How do you make sure those disadvantaged kids get a really good or outstanding option in life? That has to be the target and the focus. It is just a question of how you prioritise, which is what you asked me.

**Q240 Ian Mearns:** There are a couple of things. I am interested in the stats, Secretary of State. You said 93% of youngsters will never get to go to a grammar school, but 7% of our youngsters are in independent schools. Is that 93% of the rest, in that case?

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes.

**Q241 Ian Mearns:** Secondly, you gave a stat there on the number of youngsters being educated in good or outstanding schools. Recent experience from Ofsted, who are starting to re-inspect outstanding schools, has shown that quite a number of outstanding schools are no longer outstanding. Can you update that stat once Ofsted have completed their work in terms of re-inspecting schools which have not been inspected for quite some time because they had that outstanding tag? Some of them have had that outstanding tag for too long without fulfilling the requirements to still be outstanding.

**Gillian Keegan:** You are absolutely right. There are a couple of things that have happened. The first thing is we are re-inspecting all schools, and a massive thank you to Ofsted because they are taking on quite a lot of extra work to do this by 2025 to make sure that we have an up-to-date situation regarding our schools. The 88% is up to date. It is good or outstanding. We did update the Ofsted framework, so it is tougher to be outstanding as well. Again, we are continually upping the standards here. We are trying to get that continuous improvement.

**Q242 Ian Mearns:** Indeed. For a number of the schools who have been inspected under the new framework, it is probably the second or third framework since they were last inspected. That in itself is not healthy for those schools, given the outstanding tag prevents them from being inspected or re-inspected. That is not good from the school's perspective by comparison to their peer groups, as it were.

**Gillian Keegan:** We all know being tested, like I am being tested now, makes you up your game to make sure that you are constantly reviewing and doing the very best that you can. It is a part of the system. That is why we are delighted that we have this target by 2025 to re-inspect all schools, but 88% is the up-to-date figure. Most of the outstanding, if they did not keep outstanding, are good.

**Ian Mearns:** It seems if we are going to have an inspectorate and an inspection framework, it should apply to everyone. That is the way it seems to me.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes, I agree.

**Q243 Chair:** Secretary of State, can I return you to the Schools Bill? You just



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made the comment about disadvantaged students and the fact that they should have the best opportunities wherever they are in the country. One aspect of the Schools Bill, which is of particular interest to me I have to say, having banged on about it for decades, is the national funding formula and the delivery of direct funding to schools.

Currently, you have the power to allocate funding to local authorities, and you have the power to take some of that funding away and give it to academies within those local authorities, but you do not have the power to direct funding to schools according to the population that they serve. Should you, and will you?

**Gillian Keegan:** 2023-24 will be our first year of transition to the direct schools national funding formula. The endpoint is a system which ensures that fairness and consistency is there in the funding. We are also targeting a lot more of that funding towards deprived pupils than ever before. Right now, from what I understand, we can go quite a long way to achieving our aims to push this through non-legislative steps. We talked a little bit about the priority, and the registration safeguarding issue is a priority in terms of that too, but that is because we think we can go a long way not only in mainstream funding but also to improve the funding for special educational needs and high needs.

Q244 **Chair:** We will come back to that higher needs point, because I know there is a lot of interest in it and we are all seeing a lot of casework on that front. In terms of the mainstream funding for schools, I appreciate you can go a long way, but the local authorities who have been amongst the lowest funded would say that, because of the minimum funding guarantees and the smoothing and the protections that are in place, it will take potentially decades to get to a fair formula.

Now we have a map-led system, you have multi-academy trusts who are running different schools in different parts of the country, where they might have the same pupil characteristics but they can be facing a difference of up to £1,000 per pupil, more in some cases when you take London into account, in the amount of funding that they are receiving. Surely, it makes sense to be moving faster towards a rational system where the characteristics of the pupils that the schools serve are the basis of their funding, rather than the decisions a local authority might have taken in the 1980s.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes, and clearly you have a huge amount of expertise in this area; more than I have, I would say. I remember when we started this journey, there was a lot of discussion and a lot of concern about which aspects of the funding formula best suited different constituencies with different makeup and different pupils. The rurality was discussed a lot. There is always a debate and there is always a discussion.

For me, there are two key things. The first is we have more funding, and that is fantastic. We are funding our education system much more than we ever have in our history. Many of us can see that when we go round to the schools. They really are night and day from when I was at school.



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The other thing is that we are targeting a greater proportion on those pupils that are more deprived. They are the key things we need to get right. We know that deprivation is spread around the country in lots of different places as well, so that is the focus.

I do accept that there are many things you can do to be improving systems, to be improving funding and how it is allocated, to be improving results, and to be improving teachers. Our teachers are fantastic, but of course we are continually investing in their professional development as well, because they want to be improving. You have to prioritise based on what we can do, what time we have, and legislation. That is one that we think we can go quite a way along the journey without legislation.

**Q245 Chair:** One last thing on the Schools Bill. With the ambition to get more schools into the academy system, there are some specific needs that the Church of England and the Catholic Church have expressed around some of the barriers to converting schools in their space. Can you address those without legislation, or will we need some form of legislation to address those?

**Gillian Keegan:** That is also a priority area because, as you say, we need to remove barriers that are there for schools that want to go into multi-academy trusts. At the moment that is a barrier, so we do need to deliver that. We are committed to legislate on protections for faith schools so that they can join trusts. Obviously, that is not something that I can completely confirm is going to happen, but it is a priority along with the registration. They are definite priorities because at the moment it is difficult for faith schools to join trusts and there are some complications around land and other issues as well. We do need to focus on that.

**Q246 Mrs Drummond:** There are examples of schools off-rolling pupils for various reasons. The parents say, "Oh, do not worry, I will educate you at home," and there is no evidence as to whether they are being educated or not. You will have heard my question to the Prime Minister last week, that nine in 10 local authorities do not know who these children are. There are 115,000 estimated, but nobody knows how many there are because there is no register. It is really important so can I pin you down to a time scale on this register?

**Gillian Keegan:** I agree, it is really important and ongoing. As you point out in your real-life example, we are continuing to support local authorities with their non-statutory registers of children who are not in school, and we have published new guidance to schools on supporting children with regular attendance. We do know that there has been an impact on attendance for some children post-pandemic and we are focused every day on those who have not returned to school.

We definitely remain committed to legislating for children who are not on the school register, and we will continue to work until we make sure that they are all receiving a safe and suitable education. I cannot commit to dates or times because there is a process that has to be gone through



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and I do not have full control of it, but this is as much of a commitment and a priority for me as it is for the Committee.

**Q247 Miriam Cates:** I have a few questions about political impartiality in schools. Traditionally, we have thought that teachers should not tell children which party to vote for or which party's policies are correct, but earlier this year, the Department produced guidance on impartiality in schools because it is far more complicated now. The guidance says, "It is important to note that many ongoing ethical debates and topics will constitute a political issue. This can be the case, even when the main political parties and other parties and groups agree on a view, but there is not a wider consensus in public opinion. Instead, there is continued debate where different legitimate views are expressed." In other words, teachers and schools should not be teaching as fact political ideas on which there is an ongoing debate in the population. Have you had any feedback on this guidance; is it being adhered to in schools; what have you heard back from the sector?

**Gillian Keegan:** I have not heard back, so I will be interested to. I do not know, Susan, whether you have had any feedback? In my six weeks on the job so far, I have not had any feedback on that issue.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** We had some general early feedback from our stakeholder groups that it was helpful, but not much beyond that.

**Q248 Miriam Cates:** Okay, thank you. There is a recent report, published by Professor Eric Kaufmann of Policy Exchange, based on some YouGov polling, that found that 75% of children had been exposed to critical social justice theories in schools. By that, I mean critical race theory; the belief that the organising principle of society is racism, and gender theory, the idea that there are many genders and everyone has a gender identity. Of those three quarters of British children who had encountered those theories in schools, 68% said they have been taught those ideas as fact without alternative views being on offer or have been told that the alternative views were not respectful. Do you think that the teaching of those theories, which are highly contested and actually do not have widespread support amongst the mainstream population, as fact is politically partisan?

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes, I guess I do think that. Obviously, the guidance is there to try to navigate through some of these areas. I know you have been campaigning on transparency and I agree with you. People should be able to see what we are teaching children in schools. Parents should be able to see it and debate it. There are many issues that we will have differences of opinion about, but the ability to be transparent and have legitimate debate is fundamental in all of our educational institutions. That is where we really need to focus and may need to do more.

We are going to update guidance and widely consult on the particular debates of biological sex versus gender as it is a complex area to navigate. I am sure we will receive a lot of data and views and inputs



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from people who have been looking at this and what is happening in schools. I know there are a number of concerned parents, in fact I had a surgery in my own constituency last week with someone saying, "This is happening in my school and it is having a big impact on my family," particularly her daughter, and they did not know about it.

**Q249 Miriam Cates:** I agree that transparency is really important, that it is part of the accountability between schools and parents on these difficult issues, but it is wider than that. There is a reason that indoctrination in schools is illegal, under sections 406 and 407 of The Education Act, because in a democratic society, it is very important that schools which represent the State do not impose political views on children. There is, of course, a difference between a teacher telling a student something and that student encountering that particular view in the outside world. Teachers are in loco parentis, and students have to believe what they are told by teachers because they are programmed to do so, otherwise what would be the point in going to school? What students are told by teachers has a particular weight and these findings show that, unfortunately, a huge proportion of our children are being taught, as fact, theories that the wider population do not adhere to.

What is the Department's plan to deal with that; what are the consequences for schools for pushing forward? Some of these are pretty radical, extreme views being presented as fact. We need to think about the consequence further down the line for the rest of the population if children are being taught these theories that the rest of the population do not accept. What is the plan to make schools accountable on this?

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, the vast majority of teachers would take that responsibility you describe extremely carefully and absolutely to their heart. I know you were a teacher yourself. People have this responsibility to not only debate difficult issues, but to actually encourage the debate. We know that some of our institutions have lost their way in this. This is why we have the free speech Bill going through at the moment. We know that there are areas where we need to ensure that we have this balance right, and I do not think we are there yet. There is still part of that journey that we need to make, but also these are not all settled views. There are people who have very different views in some of these areas and we need to go through that very carefully because the wider population's views are not always either wide or settled.

I will let Susan come in on this as she has much more experience, but in terms of checking what is happening in schools and issues such as critical race theory, I know it has been a concern. We obviously work with the Equalities Minister, whose area is to really focus on much of this, but it is important that we have these debates very openly.

**Q250 Miriam Cates:** This is exactly my point. These issues are not settled, they are contested. They are completely legitimate discussions for adults to have, but where a teacher or a school puts forward or promotes one political idea to the exclusion of all others, is that not indoctrination?



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**Gillian Keegan:** Is it indoctrination? This is why our guidance is there, to say that this is what you should not do, and this is why we have the laws in place.

Q251 **Miriam Cates:** How will schools be forced to adhere to that?

**Gillian Keegan:** Ofsted provides the regulation, which we are always updating. Ofsted look at these issues and what is being taught in terms of the curriculum and making sure that it is reasonable and balanced.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Yes, that is certainly something Ofsted take very seriously, particularly, anything that has a safeguarding aspect. Ofsted always carry out parental surveys and so anything that parents raise will be followed up on. The only thing I would add is that we are asking teachers to navigate some really difficult waters. As the Secretary of State said, teachers are working extremely hard to do their best and to do that well. Our stance should be one of supporting them and helping them to do that. It is important that we are standing behind them, helping to navigate some of those conversations and, as I say, the guidance was quite well received.

Q252 **Caroline Ansell:** I really recognise what you are saying around how sensitive and complex this situation is. In a related point, I wanted to share the experience of a number of teachers who have come to me. They are very concerned by what they are being asked to teach. They do not teach it with authority or conviction and in fact they are reporting that teachers are actively calling in sick to avoid having to deliver curriculum materials that they think are actually quite damaging. I really welcome the commitment to new transparency around the curriculum materials for parents, but my concern is, is it for parents to police, monitor or judge what is right, healthy, balanced and appropriate in this way? Should this not be considered at a higher level?

I have concerns around the curriculum and teachers' ability to express their concerns. I fear that freedom of speech for teachers is not there, not least for pupils. I wanted to share one additional conversation I had with a grandfather when canvassing; to his utter dismay his five-year-old grandson had come home and said, "Today we were learning if we were in the wrong body." He told me that he would not dare raise this as a concern because he would be deemed to be transphobic. I understand that there is new guidance coming to help schools with this, but all the while schools are still trying to navigate this terrain. What would be your best advice at this point for teachers and parents who are very concerned at what they fear is being taught in schools?

**Gillian Keegan:** The point you raise is not specific to schools; this is a debate that is broader than that on both sides of the topic. We are all frightened to go on Twitter, in terms of having any views, because we have seen very, very publicly and very high-profile people become targeted because of their views on either side of that debate. The most important thing is that we retain the ability to have a sensible debate.





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That is really, really important because, as you say, we are putting together guidance in this area. It will be widely consulted on because the reality is there are different and opposing views and it is necessary to navigate through this complex area showing compassion, while considering what is age appropriate. If I am honest, I have not seen it myself when I go into schools, so I am unsure how prevalent it is, but we have all heard stories from constituents, and parents should raise their concerns, as Susan said. I know that teachers take their responsibilities very seriously. Most teachers are parents as well and they really do take care to navigate this.

**Q253 Caroline Ansell:** Are we concerned that teachers actually have that freedom of speech in their school settings? There have been a number of cases where teachers have not, in fact, been supported by their schools.

**Gillian Keegan:** I do not know if the Department has any experience of that, but I personally have not heard it. I must say, I have not found any problem with freedom of speech from any of the teachers that I mix with as a constituency MP. I have family members who are teachers as well and I have not seen that, but I would not want to see it, so if that is happening it is a difficult subject.

**Q254 Nick Fletcher:** I find it extremely concerning, hearing the types of stories that Caroline has just brought in there. There is an old saying, "Give me the child until the age of seven and I will give you the adult." If we are dropping seeds of doubt into young people, that is extremely dangerous. The debates we are talking about should be between adults; it should not be reflected in school. Books written by activists are finding their way into schools and they should not be. Parents do not realise that they have the ability to ask what is being taught.

That transparency piece needs to educate parents that they have not only a right to ask what is being taught but that they have a right to kick back against it also. They need to know where they can actually go if they do not get help or results from the school. Finally, what part can your role take in stopping controversial books making their way into schools or agreeing which books are actually appropriate?

**Gillian Keegan:** There is absolutely no doubt that it is very important that parents should know what their children being taught in school and particularly more so when the topic is sensitive. There was no transgender guidance when we went to school, as there was no need for it, but we have to deal with the world as it is, which is more complex now. There are clear requirements on schools providing parents with information about the curriculum and we believe that most schools are engaging very actively and proactively with parents on this. If that is not always the case, then clearly we need to continue to highlight those areas where we have concerns. That is part of the process between parents, teachers and Ofsted.



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There is one thing I want to just make clear, where we need to continually improve. I believe there was some question regarding whether schools could show materials to parents or whether there was a copyright issue. To put it on the record, schools can show resources to parents in person without infringing an external provider's copyright in the resource. We have also said that if somebody is asking you to restrict the right to show that resource, you should very seriously question that transparency and avoid entering into private contracts with commercial providers that seek their right to restrict. Any parent should be able to see what their child has been taught. There may be different opinions on what is age appropriate, which we are going to have to step our way through using a big dose of both common sense and transparency and listening to both parents and teachers.

**Chair:** The other thing I note is that when we had His Majesty's Chief Inspector in her accountability hearing the other day, she did make the point that the words "age appropriate" bear an enormous amount of weight in this discussion. When the Department considers its guidance, it would be helpful to have some more indications as to what that means. That is something perhaps to take away.

Q255 **Miriam Cates:** I am sorry to press you on this, but it sounds as though the Department thinks these are isolated issues. If you add the percentages together from the polling and the statistics that this research is based on, around half of British children are reporting being taught these contested, divisive political theories, as fact, with no alternative viewpoint presented or being told that the alternative views are not respectable. These are very destructive ideas that are really attacking liberalism and the whole point of not being allowed to indoctrinate children in schools, which is one of the foundations of our democracy. This is a much more widespread problem than the Department thinks. Yes, there are wide debates to be had in society, of course, but what is it appropriate to tell a five-year-old? We need to be clear that this new guidance on the transgender issue is based on safeguarding and evidence and not an attempt to balance contested views amongst children who are not old enough to entertain those ideas.

**Gillian Keegan:** 100%. As I said, there was no need for transgender guidance when we were at school. There is now and that is why we are doing it. It is clearly addressing a need. I have not seen the report, but I will look at it. I will also look at the polling and the evidence behind the report, because there are sides of this debate that have skin in the game, so I will look at the level of concern that is being raised. Most of us are parents and we are in schools all of the time. We are very concerned about this issue, but personally not every school I go into has outrage over materials that are being shown. People have raised issues but there is potentially a different view on that. It was also quite a broad question, from what you read out, it had many cultural things such as critical race and others—



**Miriam Cates:** Grouping, critical social justice theory, yes.

**Gillian Keegan:** Okay, yes, I would even have to look at the definition.

Q256 **Anna Firth:** Thank you for confirming that this new guidance will have a safeguarding first approach. Can we have your best estimate as to when this guidance will be published? Secondly, and perhaps one to take away, have you considered the potential consequences for English schools of Scotland's proposed Gender Recognition Act going through the Scottish Parliament?

**Gillian Keegan:** Obviously, it is a devolved issue and they have a different approach. There are many differences in curriculum.

Q257 **Anna Firth:** If we have families going backwards and forwards, if we have people relocating and we have a different system in Scotland, it is something which will actually have to be considered across Departments.

**Gillian Keegan:** That is probably broader than just this issue in terms of people. The education systems are different, as is the university system. There are many different systems, in terms of the guidance. I do not know if there is an absolute date, but we will be holding a full public consultation on the draft guidance prior to its publication in 2023.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Yes, we expect to bring out the draft for consultation early in 2023, but we think this is one of those things where it is really important that we consult broadly on the draft before we fix on the final guidance.

Q258 **Anna Firth:** That is very helpful, but just because we know that this is such an important issue, what is the latest that you expect this to be published? We do need this guidance; it is clearly critical.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** The draft guidance for the consultation? I am going to look at the Secretary of State because we have been doing lots of work on this in the Department. I am acutely conscious that we have a new set of Ministers and that this is a really important issue that everybody wants to look at very carefully. Left to myself, I would preserve a little bit of space for my Ministers to make sure they have time to really look at it and think about it.

**Gillian Keegan:** That is fair, because I have not seen any of the information yet and Minister Gibb is obviously very keen to put his slide rule over this as well. Maybe we can write to the Committee when we have travelled further down this road. Obviously, we have been in place for six weeks now, but we completely understand the urgency and sensitivity of the issue as well as the concern from teachers and parents. We know it is urgent and I suspect it will also be a continual debate.

Q259 **Caroline Ansell:** The guidance will presumably be around how schools best support those pupils experiencing gender disorder. Does it also reflect on the curriculum and that body of knowledge and how that might



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be delivered in this sphere through RSE? Or is that a separate and distinct study?

**Gillian Keegan:** To be honest, as I said, I have not looked at any of it. Minister Gibb probably has missed an intervening period.

I do not know if you have any answer to that. In terms of describing what is in the guidance, which is probably not the right thing to do right now, we clearly need to ensure that it does what it says on the tin. We should not lose sight in this debate of the fact that it is a sensitive issue and there are children of various ages, but teenagers as well, who are struggling with their identity, sexuality and gender.

**Caroline Ansell:** Regarding pastoral care and the curriculum.

**Gillian Keegan:** I am sure that the whole thing will be looked at and considered in terms of the guidance.

**Chair:** Back to Miriam and specifically for our Committee that has been doing a lot of work over the years, looking at both the catch-up and the disadvantage gap.

Q260 **Miriam Cates:** Obviously, before Covid-19, we were making brilliant progress on narrowing the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children. Now, sadly, that has slipped quite considerably, which is absolutely tragic but probably predictable given lockdown closing schools. What support will there be going forward for the most disadvantaged pupils to improve attainment? I refer specifically to this year's key stage 2 statistics, where only 43% of disadvantaged pupils met the expected standards.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes, this has clearly been one of the huge, tragic impacts of the pandemic that we have lost most of the ground that we had made. The things that we were doing and focusing on had started to have the right outcomes. We have that very ambitious target of 90% at key stage 2, which was going to be tough but even more so now that the starting point has gone backwards. It is absolutely critical, so what are we doing about it? The first thing is the national tutoring programme: just over 2.1 million courses have started since it was launched in November and that really is the flagship. We ensure that schools have a flexible approach to that to make sure that students can catch up and they can do so in a way that also allows them to regain their confidence. In some cases, students missed out on their ability to socialise, and this has had a big impact on children. We also have over £1 billion available to support tutoring which is going directly to schools. There are academic mentors, tuition partners and school-led tutoring. From the Ofsted review, it seems that tutoring is considered the best approach so it is something I expect will be more widely utilised.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Just drawing out beyond the national tutoring programme, our recovery premium was sent out based on the number of pupil premium students in the schools. It was aimed specifically at the



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most disadvantaged pupils in the school and a large proportion of our catch-up funding has been invested in the thing that we know works best in schools, which is investment in teacher quality. That is that kind of programme of training with the golden thread that runs all the way through the teacher's career.

We also know that one of the big challenges is making sure we can get the best teachers into schools in the areas where they are most needed, which is why we announced, as part of our education investment areas programme, that there will be additional bursaries for shortage subjects and those who teach in those areas. We are investing in teacher quality generally, which we know does support all students but disproportionately those disadvantaged pupils because they are more dependent on the teacher in the classroom for the education they receive.

We then also have a set of programmes which will be really familiar to this Committee, but I make no apology for that because we were making good progress in narrowing this gap before the pandemic. What we need to do now to continue to close it is to double-down on those programmes, for example phonics work. We saw some early promising signs that schools that were supported by English hubs achieved better results than those equivalent schools that were not, and likewise, the work of maths hubs on mathematics mastery. That really consistent focused working with teachers and building their professionalism to teach the techniques that we know work best in supporting the attainment of the most disadvantaged pupils.

**Q261 Miriam Cates:** Yes, that sounds sensible, although Ofsted's recently published review said that the catch-up tutoring cannot really work in some schools for various reasons to do with extending the school day. I trust that the Department is looking into that, and I suppose it makes sense to pursue all these ideas that were working before. However, with absence as it is, I am just trying to remember the figures but the local authority in Sheffield stated that the persistent absence before the pandemic was 14%. As of this half term we are already at 20% or 27%. If a high proportion of students, particularly the disadvantaged, are absent, it does not matter what is done in schools or how good the practice is; it will not have the effect. Is part of the plan to tackle that persistent absence?

**Gillian Keegan:** Yeah, it is absolutely fundamental that if the child is not there, they are not going to be catching up. In fact, we could make the assumption that they are probably getting further behind. The £1 billion recovery premium that Susan mentioned provides the schools with a lot of leeway in terms of how they use the fund. Many of them are using that for attendance programmes, attendance mentors and monitors, and trying to work with parents on rebuilding the child's confidence. I recently went to a school and there were a particular group of young children who just did not want to go to school and were very anxious about it. The



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school had made a classroom look like a home and were having the children come in, have breakfast and do softer activities to get the children to be more confident before integrating them into the classroom. This is just one example of how the teachers are working hard to solve the issues, as they know the families they are working with.

A lot of this money is being used for additional pastoral support to ensure that they work with families and disadvantaged children. One of the great things that we have seen is the great service that Minister Gibb has given the children of this nation in his dogmatic approach to introducing standards. Okay, we may have taken a step back, but phonics is having a massive upward effect on reading, Every child will be learning and the English and maths hubs will expand, really making sure that the child understands the fundamentals before they move on. This will reduce that whole idea of anxiety and of feeling left behind, and give the children the building blocks so that they have the fundamentals to be able to read, explore and apply maths. They are things that we have been introducing that I think will continue to have a huge positive impact on all children, but as you say, it is more prevalent with disadvantaged children. Of course, once you can read, you are able to discover knowledge which is really, really important.

I believe that great teaching is also fundamental. The NPQs, the National Professional Qualifications which are relatively new, and also the early career framework includes mentoring for the first two years. It can be quite tough on new teachers, particularly if you have not spent all that long in the classroom, and maybe you have been impacted by Covid-19 yourself in terms of your placements, and mentoring alongside their continuous development ensures that they will be very successful. I was recently speaking to a group of teachers and they were saying how freeing it was to actually be able to continually learn and update their knowledge and to know that support is on hand within the hubs etc. There are a lot of things which I really believe are going to fundamentally improve the educational prospects of our young people, we are seeing that in the PISA tables. But once that flushes through the next generation, we really will see some fantastic results.

**Chair:** Thank you, Secretary. It is great to hear your enthusiasm, but we are going to need shorter answers if we are going to cover the ground that we need to cover. I want to bring in Flick on the subject of attendance and also confidence.

Q262 **Mrs Drummond:** I was also going to talk about that 90%. Yesterday, some of us did an example of SATs. I am not sure about the Chair, but I am not sure many of us got over 90% despite the fact that we can all read, write and do mathematics perfectly well. Is this 90% really achievable, and is it not going to be at the exclusion of other subjects?

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, I think it is definitely disappointing that you did not get 90%.



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**Chair:** To be fair, the target is for 90% of people to meet the expected standard, not for people to achieve 90% results. For the record, I did get 90% in the spelling and grammar test.

**Gillian Keegan:** I guess there will be a multidisciplinary team, where someone will be good at everything. The way that they teach English, in particular, has completely changed. When we go into classrooms, I am sure that we must all have that moment where you look and think, "I am not sure." I did not know until the other day that vertices are corners. It is just the way that things are taught and the way in which you describe things. The only reason that I can keep up with a lot of the English techniques is that I learnt to speak Spanish as a second language, because it is not the way that we are taught to speak English. It is suitable for the children who are studying now and they are being taught to pass. I think it is good to have stretching targets, but it is an extremely stretching target, particularly now that, as Miriam was saying, we have gone backwards.

Q263 **Mrs Drummond:** There is a whole other discussion about that, so I will not go into it now. On attendance, when Amanda Spielman of Ofsted was giving evidence recently, she said that well over 100,000 are out of school every day and that 50,000 of these are unauthorised. In 2021, the former Secretary of State, Nadhim Zahawi, launched the attendance alliance group that seems to have been discontinued. What assessment have you made of the benefits of such a group, and have you considered re-establishing it?

**Gillian Keegan:** I do not think it has been discontinued. I am attending one early next year, I think. Yes.

**Mrs Drummond:** That answers that one then.

Q264 **Chair:** Hang on. You are attending one next year. It was meeting monthly, I think, during Nadhim's time.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes.

Q265 **Chair:** Has that continued since July last year?

**Gillian Keegan:** I do not know if it has been every month.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** It has certainly continued to meet and continued to work. Yes.

Q266 **Chair:** That is useful to know because we got the impression from Amanda that it had not met since July. She was one of the regular attenders when it was meeting regularly. Has the membership changed in that respect?

**Gillian Keegan:** I have not been to my first one. I am going in January, so it is not that far. I believe it has been ongoing. It was national leaders from Education, Health, Social Care and other services, really focused on absence. The Children's Commissioner is a key member, and she has



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made a pledge to undertake a review of local authorities to really work to understand where the missing children are and why they may be falling through the gaps. Obviously, that work is instrumental in shaping our plans as well.

We are absolutely focused on children missing from education and, personally, I am very comfortable in pledging that we will continue to take action and further action until we get children back in school. It is a bit more complex sometimes because of mental health or confidence, so we do have to rebuild more than just getting somebody to go into school, which is why it has that multidisciplinary approach, but we are very much focused on working with local authorities to ensure we improve this.

Q267 **Mrs Drummond:** You mentioned mentoring as well.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes.

**Mrs Drummond:** You will be implementing mentoring processes?

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes.

Q268 **Chair:** Just on that mentoring process, the CSJ had specific recommendations for piloting a mentoring approach, I think. While I was at the Department that was something that was definitely being looked at. Is there a pilot running yet?

**Gillian Keegan:** There is. We have launched a £5 million attendance mentors pilot project. Middlesbrough was the first area selected to take part. It is a scheme to combat those low school attendance rates, and then we will look to expand that to other areas of the country next year.

What it does is provide one-to-one mentoring support to over 1,600 persistently and severely absent pupils over a three-year period. It tackles the factors behind non-attendance such as bullying or mental health issues, as well as that feeling of just being too far behind, and that is the actual tutoring aspect of it. As I say, we will not stop until we have children back in school where they can benefit from all this fantastic investment in teachers, in the curriculum, and in improving our school buildings. We have also been improving the school buildings.

Q269 **Caroline Ansell:** Slightly related to several points you have made, can I ask about the holiday activities and food programme? I think there was a hope that it could provide a bridge around attendance because children attending the holiday activities programme would be more likely, it was believed, to return to school in September because they had kept their confidence high, their social skills, their connection, all of those things.

We have just, I think, turned the corner on year two of three years of funding. In terms of learning, are there any early insights for what the programme is achieving over and above, of course, that very important provision of food and the related provision around childcare? In levelling-up terms, obviously, children are experiencing the same level of





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resourcing in schools, or quality of teaching, but very often it is that enrichment that you find in the holidays that can make the difference around confidence and around language learning, so just that wider cultural exposure.

**Gillian Keegan:** Very much so, and skills as well. The holiday activities programme has been a welcome addition to the landscape. It is something that came about as a result of the pandemic. It is something that was brought about because of concerns that children were eating in the holidays, but also it is broader than that.

Anyone who has been to one, they are absolutely fantastic. In my own constituency, they were running around outside, building a campfire, making risotto on a campfire. Maybe that is the Chichester version, but it was unbelievable what they were doing. There were all kinds of crafts. They were making things. It was just brilliant. I joined in; I spent the whole day there. I am going to go back, hopefully, in the Christmas holidays. It is just amazing to learn these skills like fire and playing in the outdoors. Forest schools have become a feature. That is something else that was not there when we were at school, but we did go out in forests. That is absolutely key to really broaden those.

**Ian Mearns:** I can see the headline now, "Secretary of State playing with fire."

**Gillian Keegan:** Do you know what was really bad? I was really rubbish at it. All these five-year-olds are flicking the thing on and getting their things to light. Anyway, I got it eventually.

Q270 **Caroline Ansell:** Are the children and young people who are eligible for this in those schemes? What has the take-up been like? Is there any working up of the new funding beyond the three-year commitment?

**Gillian Keegan:** Last summer, the programme reached over 600,000 children, which is fantastic. That includes quite a large proportion—495,000—of those children who are eligible for free school meals. That is definitely a large number of people for a programme that is very new, and that is because they are fantastic.

However, as an MP I am always saying to more and more people, "You can do this," because with any new programme you need to continue to ensure there is awareness.

We are continuing to invest over £200 million a year in the programme and we will do so for the next three years with all 152 local authorities. Obviously, that is as far as I can say because we have another period when discussions continue. It is fair to say, if we get something that works, that provides additional support and fun and food to children, then what we need to do is build the evidence to show that something is well appreciated and works.

**Caroline Ansell:** I sat in one holiday activities programme myself at the



Art House, and they did a fabulous range of creative activities. It is set in this fabulous kind of café and one of the little girls present said, “One day, I’m going to have a business just like this.”

**Gillian Keegan:** Unbelievable, yes.

**Caroline Ansell:** That, for me, really encapsulated everything that that wholly new experience and opportunity was going to do for her, but I am concerned about the evidence base that you will need to make the case for continuing funding.

**Gillian Keegan:** Just on that, you never know when your moment of inspiration is going to come, and it is our job to ensure there are plenty of those all the way through a child's life and a young person's life. In terms of the evidence specifically, I am sure Susan has looked at it in great detail.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Yes. Just a couple of things. We have quite good data on the proportion of children for whom that is their first experience of a holiday scheme and there is quite a high proportion—I do not have the number with me, but I can write—for whom that is the first time they have ever had the experience of that kind of enrichment during the holiday.

We are looking at what else we can do on the evaluation and the understanding of what outcomes that drives for children. It is slightly early days for that because of where we are, and not just in HAF itself, but because through the pandemic we did not have some of the measures we would typically use to look at influence on things like children's attainment, but those are things we continue to look at.

The one thing I will say about this is the evidence base around take-up and experience, and the existing evidence base that there is around the impact of holiday activities and good food on children's participation, engagement and attainment, mean that each time we go to the Treasury in relation to this programme it gets a bit easier. We certainly had an easier time talking about the rollout that we were able to announce this SR than when we were setting up the pilot and I would expect that conversation to be easier again next time.

Q271 **Caroline Ansell:** Is there no link emerging between attendance at the holiday programme and the September return?

**Susan Acland-Hood:** None that we can demonstrate yet.

**Caroline Ansell:** Not yet, okay. That is fine. Thank you.

**Chair:** Thank you for that, and talking of going to the Treasury to get funding I wanted to return to the Autumn Budget. Anna, I think you are going to ask some questions.

Q272 **Anna Firth:** Thank you very much, Chair. I have now visited all but one



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of the 29 wonderful schools in the south and west and I always invite all my heads to write to me ahead of an accountability hearing such as this. I am sure it will not surprise you to hear that the No. 1 issue on every school doorstep at the moment is funding. There are three issues to this that my heads want to make sure, Secretary of State, that you have well in mind.

One is that they are being hit by normal inflation, cost-of-living style, if you like, inflation running at around 7%, but on top of that is the hyperinflation in relation to utility bills. Some of my heads have told me they are looking at 50% increases in utility bills when they roll off fixed-term energy contracts in April. The third point is the fact that every year they set their budgets in accordance with their school year, not knowing what the supplement is going to be, and that comes out after they have done their budgets.

Eighty per cent. of their budgets—this is across the piece—are staff costs. They are a school, not a business; they do not have deep reserves to fund that gap between the pay settlement for teachers even though many teachers, of course, do not think it is high enough, but they do not have the spare reserves to fund that gap, so there are three big issues to this.

One of the issues I would like your view on, which I think would just help, and it is really a process issue, is, could schools not be informed of the pay settlement before they have to go through their final budgeting process? That is point No. 1. If that is not possible, then point No. 2 is, could we not move to a system of giving schools a two- or three- or five-year—

**Chair:** The Committee, I think, has recommended this on previous occasions.

**Anna Firth:** Funding settlement. All good councils nowadays are working on a 10-year financial plan. It is the only way to ensure that essential services can be delivered year-on-year in an uncertain financial world. Now, 10 years would probably be too much of a stretch—I would probably be in big trouble with the Chancellor—but could we not look at that? That is the first issue which, in a way, it is a simple issue; it is a process issue. What are your thoughts?

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, you mentioned that councils are working on a 10-year financial plan. They will not have a 10-year settlement from the Treasury, so you can separate, to some degree, financial planning assumptions you would make. There are changes and, of course, the energy bills have been a massive change, but in general you know the parameters, like we all do with any kind of budgeting, of how you deal with uncertainty in a budget. That is the first thing I would say.

I will let Susan specifically answer the point about the timing because my understanding is the timing is not easy to do because otherwise it would have been done, right? We are not deliberately trying to make it difficult



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for schools to budget. There are some difficulties within that in terms of how that process works because it is an independent process and they do have to take in lots of other data sources and that, I guess, is all feeding into the timeframe.

However, after saying all of that, there is no doubt that the Treasury have very much listened to the concern of schools and headteachers. In fact, within my first week I had all the unions write to me asking for an extra £2 billion. I had a lot of MPs who wrote to me saying, "We really need to fund these schools, so another £2 billion is required this year." It is very fair to say that the Treasury have delivered 100% on that. They have invested £2 billion this year and £2 billion next year, which was also on top of the highest ever increases that we had had, so it is fair.

In terms of the allocations of that, you may have heard my colleague Nick Gibb on the radio yesterday saying that at high level there is an allocation. I think it is £28,000 for an average primary and £170,000 for an average secondary school—he was talking specifically about a programme today or yesterday—and, of course, everyone has had the energy bill relief scheme. We have tried to give an indication, but by the end of this year each school will know at a school level what they are going to get. We are very conscious that they want to know as soon as possible what this big announcement means for them and their school, and you will all find out very soon as well. We are working at pace to ensure that that is understood as quickly as possible.

**Q273 Anna Firth:** On the specific questions, though, that they have asked me, one is around the timing of the pay settlement versus their budgeting process and, secondly, whether there is a way to move to a multi-year approach. I am not necessarily expecting an answer today, but could you go away and look at that, please?

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, the multi-year is the ongoing, perennial discussion about everything which is a discussion with the Treasury, and it is Treasury's decision. Of course, that is something we continually work on and continually try to get. We do have some visibility. We know what we are getting this year; we know what we are getting next year. That is multi-year. We do have that and we try to get that as much as possible but, of course, you know that the Treasury has a very difficult job as well to balance all of those. In terms of the timing of the teachers' pay—

**Susan Acland-Hood:** I will do a bit on future certainty, and then I will do timing of teachers' pay. The £2 billion is next year and the other £2 billion is the year after, and we have published indicative allocations for next year. We really do try to give schools a sense of what is coming down the track, as long a timescale as we have through the spending review. The national funding formula, which we were discussing earlier, also really helps to give schools a sense of what they can expect, including both the main formula itself and the various guarantees that are associated with it, which effectively prevent schools' budgets from



moving downwards by more than a set amount. There is a reasonable window of clarity for schools about what they are going to get.

The thing which has been harder to predict in recent years is what the change in pressures is going to be like. We do not have a great deal of control over that. There is a balance between wanting to give perfect funding certainty of the input amounts and ensuring we have the ability to respond when circumstances change.

On the pay timing, I hear that and it is something we have been thinking about quite a lot. There are things that are true and things that are a reason not to change, if you know what I mean. Those two things are different, and I know that. The current process through the STRB spits out an answer towards the end of the summer term, and that also coincides with when the vast majority of other public sector pay processes conclude. There is quite often a desire in the Treasury to ensure they can look at the public sector pay position in the round. We could certainly look at whether we could move the timing for teachers' pay, but I think we would end up having to do that in a way that we would at least need to have a conversation with the Treasury about the fact that that would move it away from the ability to be considered in the round with other public sector pay. That is the bit that I think is—

**Anna Firth:** I am going to quit while I am ahead on that.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Sorry, can I just say one other thing on that? What we do try to do is make sure that we are giving really clear visibility of the system of the evidence that is going into the STRB and in a normal year the envelope is reasonably clear. In other words, people have high visibility of the recommendations being made to the STRB and the likely landing zone. Last year was quite unusual in that we saw this very significant inflation and then we had a very difficult choice to make, which was do we respond to that by giving a teachers' pay increase that is considerably higher than the recommendations that were going into the STRB and that schools are planning?

Schools had mostly planned their budget based on the recommendations that had gone into the STRB, which is a completely sensible and reasonable thing for them to have done. We could have stuck to that, but then we would have ended up with very low teachers' pay. When we changed it, that meant a surprise for schools and that was a very hard choice to have to make. What I am really pleased about is that in the £2 billion that the Treasury have provided for next year and the year after, that covers the cost of that and so that pressure is removed from schools.

Q274 **Miriam Cates:** Anna mentioned about schools lacking capital and reserves to bridge the gap, but there is a wider question on this because a lot of schools have flat roofs or at least roofs where you could put solar panels and, in theory, reduce schools' electricity bills permanently and feed back into the grid. Are there any plans for longer-term funding



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settlements or loans to schools that would enable them to invest in really important technologies like—

**Gillian Keegan:** Many schools in West Sussex do already have that. Whether it would be—

Q275 **Miriam Cates:** But if a school does not have a capital reserve, it just cannot at the moment.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** There is also £500 million additional capital that was announced yesterday which will go out to schools and colleges immediately for them to spend now. It is specifically targeted on things that will improve their energy efficiency. Again, there is a real challenge. We want to support schools with energy costs but what we really want to do is help make schools more energy efficient so that they are more resilient. So, £500 million to encourage your schools to use it.

**Gillian Keegan:** That was Nick's announcement yesterday.

Q276 **Anna Firth:** We do need to crack on, if that is okay, with some of these questions. It is very welcome that the Government increased funding in the Autumn Budget. Obviously, we welcome the fact that per-pupil funding in real terms is now at 2010 levels or will be by 2024-25. The key question is, can you assure us that that commitment is sustainable?

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes, and just so we put that into context—because often when we say 2010 it sounds like we are going back—that was the per-pupil funding, the highest level in history. That was the highest level, so that is why it is an important milestone. It is one that a lot of groups have picked on. Clearly, we have been very lucky because there are only a few Departments that did get funding. We know it is an extremely difficult economic envelope. That is something we feel is going to help a lot with our schools and school funding, and we now have the visibility for the next two years and then it continues thereafter.

Q277 **Anna Firth:** Thank you. I just want to ask about the catch-up intervention funding now because the Department's main catch-up intervention for learning loss during the pandemic is, of course, tutoring, and schools can access that at subsidised rates. The amount of the subsidy available we know is dropping from 60% in the 2022-23 academic year to just 25% in the 2023-24 academic year. That is quite a considerable drop. Are there plans to extend that subsidy into the 2024-25 academic year because, as we have heard, there is still an attainment gap that needs to be tackled? How are you proposing that schools should deal with such a sudden drop from 60% to 25% while wanting to keep the catch-up intervention going?

**Gillian Keegan:** The catch-up and the tutoring has been something that many schools think is quite a good addition to the landscape. The pupil premium really has the flexibility to be able to use that money to be able to support people who are further behind and focus on disadvantages. If



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they are focused on disadvantages, they are focused on things that will help. This is one thing.

We have now seen the evidence that this helps. That is the transition to take something which was deliberately designed—obviously Treasury rules—to have that in there to make sure upfront, as quickly as possible we stood this programme up. Of course, there have been a lot of learnings and I believe many schools will continue it in some way, shape or form using pupil premium funding. I do not know if there is anything else to add.

**Chair:** Thank you. We have gone through the brief, so I am going to bring in Nick on targeted funding through the EIAs.

Q278 **Nick Fletcher:** There are 55 education investment areas, and I believe 24 of them became priority education investment areas. I just wanted to know where we were with that and what that looked like practically for schools. I have spoken with some of the schools in my constituency and they did not really know too much about it, so I wonder if you could elaborate on that for us?

**Gillian Keegan:** These were in the Levelling Up White Paper, and they basically were to drive school improvement and improve pupil outcomes where educational attainment was weakest. That was based on key stage 2 and key stage 4. There is a key place-based strategy really focused, as we talked about before, on improving literacy and numeracy, and accelerating their progress towards meeting the required levels at key stage 2 and 4. We have talked about the target of 90%, but there is also a GCSE average grade in both English and maths to increase as well.

We have taken targets and really we are investing £86 million in trust capacity funding targeted in these EIAs over the next three years to help them to develop the capacity to take on underperforming schools. The strategies are similar to what we talked about really—investment in teachers, making sure you can attract and retain good teachers, continuously develop good teachers and that real focus on that. There is also a levelling-up premium to help to be able to pay higher for maths and physics and some of those key areas as well. That is £3,000 tax free a year. There are a number of targeted measures and there is also a WiFi focus on making sure that every one of those schools has the latest and greatest in terms of WiFi.

Q279 **Nick Fletcher:** When will they receive this funding? I believe there was a further £40 million with priority areas, so when will that be? I am being a little selfish here as Doncaster is one of these areas, which I am extremely pleased about. If you are going to level up, you have to start with education. As I say, my schools want to know when that is coming through.

**Gillian Keegan:** The priority education investment areas will receive a share of that £40 million. We mentioned funding programmes before—the



attendance programme, the mentoring pilot in Middlesbrough, leadership programmes for multi-academy trusts to enable the leadership of those to be something that can be targeted initially at CEOs, family hubs, free schools, etc. There are a number of things in different areas. In terms of when, I do not know if there is a date or plan. I guess there are some kind of bids that are part of that process as well.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Yes. The Regions Group of the Department, which is the bit of the Department that faces out and works with particular areas, is working with the individual priority improvement areas to stand up the arrangements because we will have independently-chaired boards, again, learning from the opportunity areas. We folded the opportunity areas into this programme, and those will work on the plans for the local area and that is how the shares of the £40 million will come. We are at the stage at the moment of that kind of development of the groups and the formula for plans.

Q280 **Nick Fletcher:** Are you are expecting that to be used on teacher training, additional sums of money for teachers in subjects where they are lacking in areas like—

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Not the £40 million, no, because that is what the core funding for all of the EIAs is for. The £40 million for the priority education investment areas is for things on top of that, but there will be that bit of local voice in what the local area says, "These are the things we think will make the most difference in our area," as well as the things the Secretary of State has described around attendance, improving trust leadership and so on.

Q281 **Nick Fletcher:** Will there be local consultation on that?

**Susan Acland-Hood:** There will be a dialogue between the Department and the area itself to say, "Right, how are we going to use this money to make the most difference?" It should be focused on things that are demonstrated likely to make a difference to—

Q282 **Chair:** Permanent Secretary, can I just say one of the things the DfE is structurally good at is having dialogues with local authorities. It is not always quite as good at communicating with MPs, and I think it might be a useful takeaway to ensure that all the MPs for those EIAs and priority EIAs are kept aware of what is going on on that front.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Excellent suggestion. We will certainly take it up.

Q283 **Anna Firth:** My final funding issue is special educational needs funding, please. We are all aware of the absolute surge in pupils with special educational needs. I have a brilliant special educational needs school in Southend called Kingsdown which looks after children with the highest physical and educational disabilities. The teachers in that school are superstars, but they are struggling. We welcome the fact that £2.6 billion was allocated for new school places last year in the spending review, but that is not due to be fully allocated until 2025, but they are having to





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take on extra pupils right now and need that money now.

To give you a concrete example of this wonderful school, Kingsdown, they get base-level funding of £10,000 per pupil. They obviously get top-up funding as well according to the band, but when they take on extra pupils, that base-level funding goes down to £4,000. They are being good citizens and trying to help with this surge in demand. They have taken on five extra children, but instead of getting £50,000 of base funding, they are only getting £20,000, a shortfall of £30,000. What can you do? We cannot punish good schools like this that are stepping in and doing their best to help. That funding must be protected. Could you comment, please?

**Gillian Keegan:** First of all, a massive thank you to everybody working in our special needs schools and alternative provision schools. They do an amazing job and often they are doing it under extremely difficult circumstances. We have already announced a £1.65 billion increase in high-needs funding over two years. This is an increase of 21%, which takes into account the growing pressures in terms of the system.

In terms of the autumn statement, a proportion of that £2 billion will be going to high-needs schools as well. We are also making sure that we set out the expectation that that goes directly to the schools because that is something that has also been discussed, which is how much of it is passed on to special needs schools in particular. We will be setting out our plans for that allocation shortly, but there is more funding to come. It will be allocated and we will do our very best to set the expectation that local authorities pass that on.

Q284 **Anna Firth:** Will you please bear in mind, when we get to April and the end of this energy bill relief scheme, that we look very closely at special schools to ensure that their energy costs are protected because they need so much more energy to have hydro-pools, to have the hoists. Sometimes there are feeding machines. Their needs must be looked at and protected. I will leave that one there. You recently announced that the Government's response to the SEND Review will be published early in the new year. Is this an "early" that we can be a bit more precise about, please?

**Gillian Keegan:** Very early. Just on the places, by the way, because we know there is a lot of pressure on places, my own special needs school is about three times oversubscribed. There are a lot of people wanting to attend. We will also open up 60 new special and alternative-provision free schools as well, so there is a recognition that we do need more places. As you say, the big recognition is that we need to look at the whole system because the system is under intense pressure.

We will publish a full response. My colleague, Claire Coutinho, is absolutely brilliant and is right in the detail of this. It will be early in the new year. We have not said exactly when. I think originally there was a thought that we ought to respond to children's social services and the



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Green Paper before March next year, but I can confirm that we are aiming to do it earlier than that.

**Anna Firth:** We are also awaiting the Government's response to the Josh MacAlister review.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes, which is the other one I just said—the children's social services, which is the work done by Josh MacAlister. That is early in the new year as well.

Q285 **Anna Firth:** Good. The final question from me: the minimum funding guarantee is supposed to ensure that councils pass on at least 3% of the budget increases to special schools in 2023-24. However, it has been reported that councils will be able to apply to ignore the MFG and use that money elsewhere. It is very important, please, that you confirm that that will not be the case and that that money will be going to special schools. It will be ringfenced effectively for special schools.

**Gillian Keegan:** I have not looked at that, although I will do. I do not know if Susan can add anything, but I very much looked at this latest funding because I am aware of that issue, to ensure that the funding does flow through to the schools. Do you have anything to add on that?

**Susan Acland-Hood:** It is true there is a process that allows local authorities to ask for that and that is part of some of the response to the challenge that we see on high-needs pressure, but it is very much the exception and we would want local authorities to meet a really high bar in explaining why that was the only thing they could possibly do to manage their funding.

**Anna Firth:** Thank you.

Q286 **Chair:** Lastly on this point, you have talked about the teaching pay award and we are going to come back to the issue of teacher retention shortly. Of course, the non-teaching pay award is a particular challenge for the special schools sector. The question I asked of the Chancellor the other day on one of his statements was, was there confidence that the extra £2 billion for education will allow schools to meet the challenge of both the teaching and the non-teaching pay award? The answer I got from him was somewhat equivocal, to put it mildly. Have you looked at the overall cost of the non-teaching pay award for the specialist sector, and is that factored into your calculations of the allocation of the extra funding?

**Gillian Keegan:** Obviously, down in all the details is a lot of detail, but the IFS have stated that the additional funding announced at the autumn statement will fully cover expected increases in school costs up to 2024. They have looked at it; they have looked into the details. Obviously, we are incredibly grateful to our teaching assistants as well and there have been negotiations, I think, and they have accepted a pay rise of 10% on average, obviously, because they are lower paid. In terms of teachers, it is 5% on the bands for experienced teachers, although obviously you can



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move up in the bands as well so it depends on where you are in that journey, and 8.9% for newly starting teachers. We are on track to meet the minimum starting salary of £30,000 by 2024—by 2023, I think, actually.

**Q287 Ian Mearns:** Thank you very much. Secretary of State, just a quick observation because you are praising teachers and institutions which are actually special schools, which I echo absolutely, but would also point out that there are many youngsters with education, health and care plans in mainstream schools and many pupils with non-EHCP defined special educational needs in mainstream schools. Teachers have as much difficulty in terms of resourcing for them in those institutions as happens in the special education needs defined sector.

The Chancellor in the autumn statement was in the privileged position of being a Chancellor and a former Health Secretary and a former Chair of the Health Committee, and was able to single out the Department of Health as requiring the development of a workforce plan. Do we not need a workforce plan for the Department for Education and for our schools and for our children's services as well?

The reason I ask that is because we have seen some figures, just on teachers this year, that in 2021 the Department reached 79% of its recruitment target for trainee secondary teachers, and this year it is only 59%. Within that, there are some really worrying statistics. The number of physics teachers recruited this year is only 444. If they all qualify and they all go on to want to teach in our school system here in England, that will only be one for every 10 schools in the secondary sector.

Similarly, there are worrying statistics for maths, for STEM subjects across the board, where in 2019-20 there were, in total, 5,865 postgraduate new entrants, and in this year just over 4,000 in STEM subjects.

That is a worrying set of trends, but also let us not forget, if we are going to get all of the aspects of education right, we need to have programmes for teachers, for early years professionals, for educational psychologists, and for speech therapists. I know that is the Department of Health's responsibility, but we have to have an influence there for future leaders, heads and deputies for continuing professional development as all our teachers and our schools wrestle with the continuing changing landscape of the education sector. Then, there are a whole range of others like attendance officers, exam officers, and then going on at FE and HE. All of those things need some workforce planning.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes.

**Ian Mearns:** Do you agree with me that, like the NEHS, our education service and our children's services need some proper workforce planning?

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes. It is an essential part of running anything. I spent 30 years running businesses and I cannot think how I would have done that without a workforce plan. You need your workforce, and they do not



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just happen by accident, you need to think about it. That is why there was a teacher recruitment and retention strategy published in 2019, and that included—

**Q288 Ian Mearns:** You have conducted a market review, which has cut across it all to a large extent, has it not?

**Gillian Keegan:** It was focused on reforming teaching, the early career framework, and how we make sure that we have the right foundations in place for a successful career in teaching. Recruitment is one thing, but retention is also vital. In fact, in any business, you will normally focus on retention first and then recruitment, because that is normally the thing that you can deliver more easily.

There are 500,000 teacher training and development opportunities being created by the end of 2024. Some £181 million has gone into the initial teacher training financial incentives package for the new recruitment cycle, which is a £52 million increase on the last cycle. That is increased bursaries and scholarships for trainees in priority subjects as well. We mentioned a levelling-up premium before, the £3,000 tax-free for maths and physics, chemistry and computing, for the first five years.

We are also partnered with sector mental health experts to create the education staff wellbeing charter and about 2,200 schools and colleges have signed up so far. That is a focus on retention as well. The new funding in continued professional development, the national professional qualifications, are a really important part. I am hearing, from anecdotal evidence, that a lot of teachers are really motivated as they go out around and about. That investment in helping them to be able to, continue to—

**Ian Mearns:** That all sounds very positive.

**Gillian Keegan:** It is.

**Q289 Ian Mearns:** But in terms of numbers on the ground, it is not looking that positive; a) in terms of recruitment, but also b) in terms of retention. Retention has been a systemic problem for quite some time, and I really do think it is something that the Department and yourself, the Secretary of State, do need to get your head around.

**Gillian Keegan:** 100%. Though it is fair to say that the pandemic has created some exceptional circumstances regarding retention and displacement. In terms of retention, we have seen that in every other sector, many people have changed their approach to work or maybe retired early or are doing different things. We have also seen—as a result of not only that, but also the global displacement from the pandemic—that there is a very, very competitive market for labour at the moment. That is affecting teaching as much as anything else.

Right now, we are trying to get ahead by investing in a lot of the things that I was talking about. The starting salary was a key part which was



recognised in the manifesto, but we are not stopping there. As you will know, I am always keen to look at what more we can do and I believe that we could potentially look into maths and a physics teaching apprenticeship for undergraduates. I have asked the Department to look into whether that is something we could develop. Would that broaden the pipeline? Would that allow people who maybe had had a career in engineering and might want to teach as their second career, or indeed want to earn and learn at the same time and avoid the student debt and the loan, etc?

We will continue to do this, a combination of all the things that are in place and the continued professional development, the mental health support, and looking at broadening the roots into teaching now as the sort of combination—

**Q290 Ian Mearns:** I hope you are right, because attrition rates traditionally have not been very good. If we look at the workforce data, of those who were recruited in 2011, 40% had left the profession by 2021.

**Gillian Keegan:** That is true. I was looking at whether that is unusual or not, and actually, I do not know. Over that period of time, if you compare 10 or 11 years in a profession and 60% retention, is that an outlier or not? I have asked because I do not think anybody has done that comparison, but I think your point stands: once we have invested in teaching, most people see teaching as a vocational job, something they want to do, something they love doing. Obviously, you want to keep people in the profession as long as possible.

Friends of mine who are no longer teachers—apart from ones who are now Members of Parliament—have many reasons. Of the two friends who stopped teaching, one stopped because of the lack of flexibility and the other left because of an incident regarding behaviour in schools. It is a good idea to look more flexibly and be more creative around job share, which is something I have seen in schools for mums and dads with young kids. Behaviour is another focus, to make sure that schools are a great environment and teachers feel like they can really get on with teaching the kids.

**Q291 Chair:** I want to bring in Nick on the subject, because I know he signalled early when he wants to come in. You have been very generous with your time so far. Are you able to give us until 12 o'clock? We have a lot of ground to cover, which we may not otherwise be able to, because of—

**Gillian Keegan:** I only have to go—we all have to—for PMQs.

**Chair:** Exactly. Great. I will bring in Nick and then, if it is alright, we will go a little bit beyond 11.30 because we still have some important questions to ask.

**Q292 Nick Fletcher:** Ben Bradley had a Westminster Hall debate on the lack of male teachers in primary and nursery schools. Only 14% of teachers are male, and we are encouraging women to go into STEM subjects, which is



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fantastic and really important, but surely if we are doing that, we are creating a problem. Some of those women that may have ended up in teaching have decided to go into other paths, into engineering, which is fantastic.

My question is, what are we doing to encourage men into teaching? I have not heard of any programmes that are happening. There are so many other issues that follow from this, with many young boys at home without a father figure and no male role models in their life, which is something that I have been working on closely. Is the Department doing anything to encourage men into teaching, and if not, can it do something to do that? Because 14% is extremely low.

**Gillian Keegan:** I completely agree with you. We want to get more men into teaching, which is why I am interested in exploring things like apprenticeships, because a lot of people still need to earn, particularly if you are looking at it as a second career.

For both you and I, this is our second career. We have had long careers outside, and I think teaching is a fantastic opportunity to bring your experience, all that knowledge you have, and often experience with your own children as well, to the classroom.

I am really passionate about supporting those journeys and helping get more great teachers, but more male teachers definitely would be fantastic. I do not know if there has been any specific programme in the past to look at that. I know that in my own area we are always trying to encourage more men into teaching, but I do not know if there have been any specific departmental programmes.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** We tended to look at diversity, inclusion, and representativeness of the profession more broadly. We will consciously think about the role models we are using in our advertising, for example, to try and make sure we are attracting people to the profession who are going to make it more representative, particularly men in primary teaching. The balance is different in secondary, and it is also very different when you look at leadership. Men are more likely to become senior leaders in the profession. We are trying to look at all the dimensions of that issue.

Q293 **Chair:** One thing which does not require an answer now, it is more an observation than anything else: it strikes me that a missed opportunity in this space was the launch, with much fanfare some years ago, of the Troops to Teachers programme. We ought to be looking at ways of getting former Armed Forces personnel and veterans into education. The challenges in the way that played out were the graduate-only nature of the teaching workforce, and also the focus on shortage subjects. Those did not match up with the skillset that people could bring from the Armed Forces. That is something the Department needs to do some more work on, and I would recommend engaging with the MoD to try and design a scheme which is more effective in the future.



**Gillian Keegan:** Which could indeed be an apprenticeship model as well, because that is something that will take you on that journey, and we know that many people will have potentially missed out on having some of those qualifications if they have left school many years ago.

Q294 **Andrew Lewer:** You recently said you are having conversations with union leaders to prevent harmful strike action. Can you give us an update on the progress of those discussions, and are there going to be further talks with the unions before January?

**Gillian Keegan:** We are having many conversations. I have had conversations, Minister Gibb has had conversations, Minister Halfon has had conversations, many officials in the Department are having conversations as well. Clearly, the biggest focus was to first try and resolve the funding request, the £2 million request of the unions.

We know that three of the four unions are balloting at the moment, that is an ongoing process. Teachers are going through that process, but we do not think it is a good idea to strike. We have had additional funding put into schools. We have had the sector recognise the independent pay review body, whose 5% to 8.9% increase has been accepted in full.

We all understand that, for everybody, these are difficult, challenging times. That is why we have things like the energy bill relief scheme, which of course is open to everybody.

We would urge teachers specifically. We know the impact that not having time in school has on young people; we have seen a really stark example of that in the pandemic. We need our kids in school, and to get our kids in school, we need our teachers in school. We would very much thank them for all their amazing efforts but continue to urge them to be in school where their children need them.

Q295 **Chair:** I fully echo your remarks in terms of not wanting to see any of the damage of the period when schools were closed be repeated. During that period, though, we did see settings for the most vulnerable children and special educational settings being kept open, and all credit to the workforce who enabled that. In the event of strikes, are there any plans to be able to support the most vulnerable in a similar way?

**Gillian Keegan:** There is a lot of planning going on across the Government to mitigate the impact of harmful strike action. One of the factors we are looking at is relying on various other pools of people and staff. It is part of the planning. Whilst hopeful that the teachers will not vote for strike action, we are planning to make sure that we have some mitigations in place. Susan, do you have anything specific to say on that?

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Other than working on the plans, we also know that schools and teachers understand the impact on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In the past, we have seen schools go out of their way to try to make sure that even where strike action does take place, they will work very hard to make sure that there is provision for



children who would find it really difficult to be at home or would be ill-served by that.

**Q296 Ian Mearns:** A recent report by EDSK found that nearly 50% of young people were leaving their apprenticeships because they considered them to be of poor quality. Given your ambition to increase access to high-quality apprenticeships, can you elaborate on how you will achieve this and how long it will take?

We have some recovering to do, because we have brought in the apprenticeship levy with the view of having a great increase in the number of apprenticeships, but what actually happened in the aftermath of that was the number of people starting apprenticeships went down.

Another potential problem in terms of the attrition rate for young people going onto apprenticeships is that they are not getting the right careers, information, education, advice, and guidance before embarking on those apprenticeships. We recently saw a panel of young people, most of whom—in one session all of them—said they had never heard of the National Careers Service. What needs to be done is to ensure that all young people are aware of the support available to them by the National Careers Service or through some other more robust, potentially local alternatives.

**Gillian Keegan:** Last time I was on this Committee, we talked very much about careers. One of the wonderful things about coming back—apart from the fact that it is the best Department and it is the best job—is that it is great to see how much progress the Department has made on lots of these areas over the last two years or so since I have been away, and careers is one of those areas. The legislation which was in the Skills and Post-16 Act strengthens the Baker clause, the Careers & Enterprise Company has now been rolled out with the Gatsby benchmarks, too, in about 80% of schools. There has been a lot of great progress, however—

**Ian Mearns:** This is the big but, as they say.

**Gillian Keegan:** You will know the same as I do. We go around and ask, “Do you know about it? Are you using it? Was it helpful?” Of course, the awareness of many of these things is still something that we need to grow. Most people still have an antiquated view of what you can achieve and what routes apprenticeships can lead you to. We need to increase awareness of the fact that you can become a space engineer using an apprenticeship. You can be a lawyer, you can be an accountant. We developed 650 apprenticeship standards. In terms of numbers, 5.2 million people have undertaken apprenticeships since 2010.

They are reforming, they are being successful. We continually see work on the quality and the completion rates because that is another thing to make sure of. The achievement rates increased by 0.2% in 2020/2021, but was 7% lower than 1920. Of course, the pandemic will have had some impacts, but we want to see an increase in achievement rates:





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67% by the end of 2024/2025 is what we have set, and it is 52% for standards at the moment.

**Q297 Ian Mearns:** I am a great advocate for career education, information, advice, and guidance. But I actually think if we had much more robust, independent, and impartial advice and guidance in our schools, and probably from a much earlier age and on a more progressive and ongoing basis, we could prevent some of that attrition. Every time a young person falls off a course of study, it is bad for the institution, it is bad for the individual, but it is also bad for our whole skills agenda and our economy.

It is all very well to talk about all the Baker clause and of the Gatsby benchmarks, both of which are not being adhered to by far too many schools. There are far too many schools who are just doing one or two of the benchmarks, never mind six or eight.

**Gillian Keegan:** Well, they are going to find that OFSTED will be asking them about this. And I think it is important—

**Q298 Ian Mearns:** It is not going to be something which will preclude them from getting a “good” or “outstanding” if they are not doing it properly.

**Gillian Keegan:** They will take all of these things into the round to look at whether they give the ratings, and this is something that they will consider. We are investing £100 million this year to help people get high quality careers provision, that includes £30 million to support schools and colleges to improve their careers programmes. We have adult careers provision as well.

You mentioned the National Careers Service. Overall, 1 million jobs and learning outcomes have been achieved by the National Careers Service, 71% of those were face-to-face and telephone customers progressing into new learning and 44% into employment. A lot of people have used it, is the point. Maybe—

**Q299 Ian Mearns:** Secretary of State, the thing is, I am an old stagehand, I remember when we had a career service national association, and back in those days, the annual budget of career service being provided across the country was something in the nature of £200 million.

Here we are, probably 25 years later, looking at £100 million for the National Careers Service, The Careers & Enterprise Company gets £30 million of that. We are talking about a pittance by comparison, particularly given the number of youngsters in our system by comparison as well.

**Gillian Keegan:** You can say it, and I was in this situation, and that system did not deliver very good careers advice to the vast majority of young people across the country. In reality—

**Ian Mearns:** It was never a golden age, but—

**Gillian Keegan:** It was nothing like a golden age.



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**Ian Mearns:** Absolutely. There was never a golden age, but it was better resourced than it is now.

**Gillian Keegan:** It might have been, but it did not achieve much in terms of careers. What I think is most important, and this is the difficulty with careers—I am saying this from a perspective of somebody who spent 30 years in various business careers in various parts of the world in various sectors—the type of future career of someone sat in primary school right now has probably not even been thought of yet. This is the challenge with technology, our ambitions on climate, our ambitions for many, many areas, to improve the way we do things in the world.

These careers are developing all the time. That is why it is very difficult to rely on that kind of model, so the best way to do it is to create that curiosity and the opportunity for young people. I agree with you, we have now expanded that into primary as well, to go into these organisations, employers, workplaces, ask questions, have people come in, talk to them about space engineering if that is something you are interested in. We have Tim Peake in our area, he is very inspiring to many Chichester young people. This is what we need to do, get those role models in and to completely provide the curiosity so that people can ask all the questions.

Q300 **Ian Mearns:** I could not agree more, Secretary of State. We need to enthuse our young people about the possibilities and the potential for them. At the same time, we also need to have a robust set of information, advice, and guides about what is readily available to them, should they wish to progress. It is also more important to develop the economy in such a way that young people can actually do really exciting things in their own locality.

**Gillian Keegan:** One of the things I was delighted to see, just in terms of exciting things and to inspire people in some directions, is the WorldSkills and the increased investment in WorldSkills. It is fantastic. Everybody is talking about trying to get their mechatronics teams to the next level, and this is amazing. I do not know if you have anything to add in terms of careers, Susan? I am sure we will be discussing it a lot. Because we have discussed it a lot.

Q301 **Chair:** We will. Our inquiry continues. Susan, do you want to come in briefly, and I will try to move on to the final questions.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** I will be very brief. I agree with everything the Secretary of State has said. The one thing I will say is, I am not totally surprised that children have not heard of the National Careers Service. This is one of the sort of slightly peculiar features of the landscape; the National Careers Services is aimed at adults. It is not meant to provide services to children. Although it would be great if they knew that it was a thing that was going to support them in later life, that is not the same as them not getting good quality careers advice now.



We made a choice to focus on careers advice and guidance through schools, not always by schools, but by bringing those people in to have experiences, exactly as the Secretary of State has said. That is partly because children and young people repeatedly told us that the people they go to for careers advice naturally are their parents and their teachers. You can try to break that pattern, or you can accept that that is—

**Q302 Ian Mearns:** Which is fine, except for the many youngsters in society who do not have the social capital or the networks through their parents, etc.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** That is why we are trying to use the Careers & Enterprise Company, the support through the Careers Hubs, the Gatsby benchmarks, to give many more of those experiences to many more children and people. We are doubling down on trying to make sure that schools are using the Gatsby benchmarks and doing the things we have asked them to do, including the increased ask we have made through the Skills Act; that is the right direction. We see the effect of that in the schools where they do it.

**Gillian Keegan:** Particularly in disadvantaged schools.

**Q303 Chair:** I am sorry, Secretary, but we are running out of time. Can I turn to the early years? You are reflecting on progress and areas made, but in your comments earlier, you suggested there was more work to be done on this front, which I certainly welcome. This year, around 35% of young children did not meet a good level of development in the early years foundation stage assessment.

In your view, what improvements need to be made within early years education to better support those children and ensure that they are reaching a good level of development?

You also mentioned Family Hubs earlier. That is an area where there is some excitement about the work to be done. Speaking to some people within the early years space, however, it seems that there is concern that that is perhaps overly health-oriented and not enough focus on education yet. Do you think there is an opportunity for the Department to do more in that space?

**Gillian Keegan:** The Family Hubs are an opportunity for us all to do more. This has been a perennial problem. Growing up in Knowsley, I can tell you I have seen this a lot and the impact it has. It is very difficult for a child to catch up on those missing stages of life, which is why Andrea is really focused on that first two years of a child's life. In fact, there are some very specific milestones that we need to encourage children to get. We know that 40% of the overall gap between disadvantaged 16-year-olds and their peers has emerged by the age of five. This is why there is such a focus on early years.



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We know that people will benefit from attending early childhood care and education, which is also why we are funding 15 hours of free education a week for disadvantaged two-year-olds. We have the offer for three to four-year-olds as well.

One of the key things is two thirds of primary schools which have signed up to the Nuffield Early Language Intervention. That was not my area, but it was much talked about and focused on, because enabling young people to have the speech and language that they need is also a key thing: 90,000 disadvantaged four and five-year-olds have benefited, or will benefit, from that.

Q304 **Chair:** NELI is brilliant, from all accounts. Everyone who has used it likes it. Is it reaching the right children, though? The concern is, particularly below school age, there are increasing levels of speech and language difficulties for whatever reasons.

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes.

Q305 **Chair:** All the primary school heads I ever speak to say fewer children arriving at school are school-ready. If children cannot communicate effectively and cannot build up their vocabulary, they are going to struggle to read, they are going to struggle all the way through education. I think it is 78% for take-up for the two-year-old offer. Given how important that is for closing the disadvantage gap, would you not like to see that higher?

**Gillian Keegan:** Yes is the simple answer to that. Claire Coutinho and I have both been in place for six weeks now, but we know how important this period of time is for children, and we know the impact it has on outcomes later on. She is very much going to be looking at what is working, what more we need to do.

Some 72% of eligible children have taken up the two-year-old entitlement, but that is an increase. It is an increase from 62%. It is increasing; we want to continue increasing it and looking at what more we need to do.

We understand childcare and childcare costs are worrying to families, so there are a lot of things in this area that we will also be looking at.

Q306 **Chair:** On that question of cost, I was at the all-party parliamentary group for childcare yesterday and they were describing a perfect storm of cost pressures they are facing. The struggle to recruit early years professionals, becoming ever more competitive, and with the very large increases in the national living wage, the competition from other roles that might offer flexible working being more intense on that front.

The energy cost, which of course is common with schools; but unlike schools, they face immediate pressures on things like business rates, which are still applied to the independent and voluntary sector in the early years in childcare. Are there any urgent steps that the Department



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can take to help the sector with these costs?

**Gillian Keegan:** You explained something that is impacting pretty much everybody in the country; of course childcare would not be immune to that. We are investing in the workforce as part of the education recovery, so £180 million in the early years workforce.

Feeling recognised, feeling valued, and also getting the support you need to be able to continue in your job and to develop professionally is a really important factor. This includes the third phase of a professional development programme, which provides training on communication and language and early mathematics and personal social and emotional development for early years. It has already trained about 2,700 early years professionals, and it will train up to 10,000 more.

We are looking at that, and we are also funding up to 5,000 early special educational needs co-ordinators to help bring that expertise into the right area so that early years can really overcome some of these difficulties which we know are there.

There is often discussion about the rate and things like that, that is going to be published by the end of the year so we will get some clarity on that soon.

Q307 **Chair:** That would be welcome, and a recognition of the pressures that are facing the sector would be useful in that area. The other area here is the tax-free childcare offer, which sits not with the DfE but with the Treasury. I should correct myself on the 72% rather than 78% for two-year-olds, but by comparison, the tax-free childcare take-up is about 20%. That clearly is not good. Is that something that you are having conversations with the Treasury about, or is it something that is down to them to sort out?

**Gillian Keegan:** It is something that Minister Coutinho is looking at in the round: what things are working, what things are not, what more we need to do. We understand all the investment that we are making in education, in standards and excellence, a lot of that requires for young kids to turn up with some of those development stages already achieved before they start school. It is really, really important that we do support families, to make sure that that happens. I will give her a bit more time to come back with her thoughts, but I am sure she will be happy to discuss further.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Just to add one thing. Yes, we are conscious of that and we do talk to the Treasury about it. To be completely fair, that is the take-up across the whole of children's ages between nought and 12, and we know that for many parents, the need for childcare will diminish over that period.

We have, at various points, been looking with the Treasury and others at the whole of the system for childcare funding, and thinking about that as we do this work for Minister Coutinho.



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In the meantime, though, we launched a campaign over the summer to make sure people are aware of the entitlements that are out there. With your permission, I will use this Committee as a tiny piece of additional advertising. You can say to any parent who is not sure if they are eligible for tax-free childcare, there is a really easy way to check on the website. Lots more people are eligible than think they are, and I encourage people to have a look and take it up, because it is something that is available now that can help people with their childcare costs.

**Q308 Chair:** I welcome that; that certainly is needed. Finally, on ratios. We have had debates in Westminster Hall about this, where there was a fairly unanimous view that ratios were not necessarily the obvious place to look to help this sector.

The Department's consultation has been criticised by some as being potentially dangerous. Recently, Claire did say that the Department is already taking steps to ensure safety measures are part of the proposals. Can you give us any detail on what safety measures are being considered and what steps have already been taken?

**Gillian Keegan:** One of the things that has come to light with this discussion and the consultation is the tragic case of Oliver Steeper. Our heartfelt condolences go out to his parents, Zoe and Lewis. What happened in that case is every parent's nightmare. That is one area that we and Minister Coutinho are particularly keen to look at further.

**Q309 Ian Mearns:** On the current situation regarding Strep A, I am just wondering if the Department is going to issue some clear guidance to schools about how exactly to deal with any worries or concerns that they have, and how to alleviate the worries and concerns of parents, so that it does not adversely affect attendance which is vital to youngsters' progression.

**Gillian Keegan:** It is a health lead, but we are working very closely with the leaders from the UKHSA, and we are monitoring the situation as well, because it is worrying. Again, our condolences and thoughts go out to the family, it is tragic when this happens. It is very, very rare and very small numbers, but all parents should be vigilant. Sore throat, rash, fever, call 111. Any concerns, call 111. Clearly, we need to make sure that people get the support as soon as they can. It is something that we are monitoring closely, but the UKHSA is leading on it.

**Susan Acland-Hood:** Specifically on advice for schools, we are disseminating the UKHSA advice through our daily bulletins to schools.

**Chair:** Finally, I just wanted to touch on British Baccalaureate, if you wanted to touch on that before you run down to PMQs.

**Q310 Mrs Drummond:** I know the Prime Minister has mentioned a British Baccalaureate, so we just want to know what discussions you have had with him. You will have seen that there has been about seven commissions over the last year that have written on this. There is a broad



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consensus that we want to have a change in the curriculum assessment. Just very, very quickly, what are your thoughts on that?

**Ian Mearns:** Given it is a British Baccalaureate, what discussions is he having with the devolved powers?

**Gillian Keegan:** I can assure you that I will be going to Cardiff on Friday to meet the devolved powers, my counterparts. I have already met them online, but I will be meeting them face to face, which I very much look forward to. It is focused around maths to 18. We know that maths is a key foundation for many pathways—particularly STEM, but others as well—so we have done a lot of work to make sure that there is better maths teaching and people going further with maths. A-level maths is the most popular now, but clearly the scope is to go further to improve and look at that. What more should we be doing to really look at how we increase the proportion of young people who study maths at some point, post-16? These are the kinds of discussions in that space.

**Mrs Drummond:** Secretary of State, you have an open mind on this.

**Gillian Keegan:** I have an open mind on most things.

Q311 **Mrs Drummond:** That is great. It is just that maybe some Government Ministers do not, so I just need to know that you are leading the charge and that you will be listening to quite lot of these new ideas that are coming forward.

**Gillian Keegan:** I think that is true, but we also have to figure out where we are, because we possibly have two years left in terms of that, so throwing everything up in the air is not a good idea either. We need to have a very open, pragmatic mind.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, Secretary of State. You have been very generous with your time.