

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability hearing, HC 82](#)

Wednesday 23 June 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 23 June 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Apsana Begum; Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; David Johnston; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 842 - 931

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State, Department for Education; and Iain King, Chief Financial Officer (joint role), and Director of Operational Finance, Operations Group, Department for Education.

Written evidence from witnesses:



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Gavin Williamson and Iain King.

Q842 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming today and thank you to the Secretary of State. This is a general accountability session, although we will do the first 10 minutes or so on the report that we published yesterday on white working-class boys and girls faced by disadvantage.

Secretary of State, could you introduce yourself and your title for the benefit of these watching on Parliament TV?

Gavin Williamson: Certainly, Rob. I am Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education.

Q843 **Chair:** Thank you. You will have seen our report yesterday on white working-class pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. We know that disadvantaged pupils from other ethnic groups for the most part perform much better, and our Committee report identified a number of factors that may combine to put white working-class pupils at a disadvantage, including persistence of multigenerational disadvantage, place-based factors, family experience of education, a lack of social capital, disengagement from the curriculum, and a failure to address low participation in higher education. Therefore, this cannot be put down to poverty alone and the answer cannot be just more of the same policies to solve the attainment gap.

Is the Department committed to understand what is happening in terms of white working-class boys and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds? Surely, we can only assume that the most effective interventions for this cohort will actually close this gap once we can establish and address the underlying causes.

Gavin Williamson: Rob, thank you ever so much for the report, which obviously the Committee has spent an awful lot of time and thought and research on in terms of pulling together. I always recall, back in September 2019, when I was addressing Universities UK, one of the key areas that I highlighted was white boys on free school meals were the group of youngsters who were least likely to go to university and how we need to deliver change for this group of youngsters.

You saw last year more of that group going to university, but we need to go much further. Your report was absolutely right to highlight that it is not just through higher education as well. It is actually through a much broader range of provisions, and it is not just in the post-16, post-18 environment. Obviously, higher technical qualifications are incredibly important much more broadly to our post-16 education system.

Q844 **Chair:** Just to intervene if I may, do you recognise that the Department's emphasis on driving up standards generally without targeted solutions will not help this particular cohort to catch up with peers and close the



gap? What I am trying to understand is: do you believe there should be targeted solutions to help this significant disadvantage faced by white working-class pupils on free school meals?

Gavin Williamson: We think that there should be targeted solutions at all children who are potentially behind, regardless of the background that they come from. You highlight an issue in terms of a cohort of children where there is a challenge. We have already been doing quite a considerable amount of work as to how we can start to close that gap, whether this is through the opportunity areas where we see a very targeted approach, whether it is through the rollout in terms of action areas where there are some youngsters with very acute challenges in terms of their learning and where they are.

Equally, we cannot forget how important it is to have a very strong approach right across the board. Over the last 11 years what we have done in the development of curriculum, whether it is teaching English, maths or science, is we have very clearly looked at what the best methods are right across the globe as to what delivers the best for children, and we have driven those interventions extremely hard.

Q845 **Chair:** Can I just ask you gently to be concise because we have masses to get through today? I know there is loads to say.

Can I move on to the pupil premium? The Committee report yesterday recommended that the pupil premium should be weighted to account for persistent disadvantage, including in disadvantaged white communities. I have raised this point with Ministers in the Committee before. Why has the Department failed to implement a more sophisticated metric than the Ever 6 rule, whereby pupils recorded as eligible for free school meals at the time of the October census, or at any time in the previous six years, will attract pupil premium funding? Will you consider tougher action, including ring-fencing a percentage of the pupil premium to offer activities and enrichment opportunities, and other recommendations suggested by Jonathan Gullis, which was a recommendation in our report?

Gavin Williamson: We are very keen to get the pupil premium working better for children from disadvantaged areas, to make sure it is not just another revenue stream going into schools but is targeted at the children that need that help. Obviously, any terms of change of reference for the pupil premium would be very much part of a discussion through the Comprehensive Spending Review. We are just in receipt of your report. We will look at that closely, but I am not in a position to be able to confirm the approach that we are going to take, or whether we are going to make those changes to pupil premium.

As I say, currently over the last year, the key emphasis has been to ensure that the pupil premium is spent in delivering for children, who it is targeted for, the types of interventions that are most going to advantage them.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q846 **Chair:** Are you really open to genuinely look at this?

Gavin Williamson: We are incredibly open-minded because your report highlighted some real clear issues, and issues that we have already been making a start on.

Q847 **Chair:** Can I move on to persistent absence, a question I asked you in the House of Commons on Monday in education questions? The number of secondary school pupils who are missing for 10% or more of their education has risen from 454,167 pupils to 501,642 pupils. That is a rise of over 47,000 in a year. You talked about REACT when you answered my question in the House. How many pupils have you been able to support through REACT?

Gavin Williamson: It is very much about supporting the whole system and bringing people together, but we can see that in evidence in terms of the attendance of pupils, especially through some of the periods of lockdown, where initiating this scheme effectively doubled the number of vulnerable children who were attending school in the second lockdown compared to the first lockdown. We saw a real significant increase in the number of pupils who were attending school all the way and—

Q848 **Chair:** It has been over a year since REACT was announced and I think, according to *Schools Week*, 14 April was the first public reference to it. Are you able to share statistics about the reach and impact of REACT with the Committee? I appreciate you may not have them on you but is it something you are able to send to us?

Gavin Williamson: We would be very happy to do that. It is also working very closely in terms of the struggling families initiative with MHCLG, making sure that we pull all these threads together. Obviously, the quality of education and getting children into school has been one of the key drivers of the Department at all stages during this pandemic. The fact that we took the action to make sure schools were open to the most vulnerable children as well as key workers was a first among, I think, probably any European nation. It is recognition that keeping them in a safe environment, which school is, is so incredibly important.

Q849 **Chair:** I will move on to elective home education and start by acknowledging that most parents who home educate their children do a remarkable job. At the moment, nobody knows how many people are in elective home education. The most reliable estimate is that there are at least 75,000 children in elective home education in England, but the actual rate could be higher still, as fewer than one in 10 local authorities are confident that they know all of the children who are in elective home education in their area. We know that during the pandemic an estimated 20,000 pupils moved to elective home education.

Do you agree that there should be a register for elective home education children? I know it has been spoken of in the past and Nick Gibb said on 19 May that the Government remains committed to a registration system for children not in school, but there is no mention in the Queen's Speech



HOUSE OF COMMONS

or any further indication as to when this might happen. When will you finally commit to introduce a register for elective home education children and when will it happen?

Gavin Williamson: Nick is absolutely right to underline our absolute commitment to a register. It is, shall we say, imminent as to when this will be brought forward. It is incredibly important to ensure that there is that sort of accountability and that monitoring. That is why we are going to be bringing it forward.

Q850 **Chair:** Is that imminent before the summer recess or is it a Civil Service-type imminent?

Gavin Williamson: It is very, very imminent. You are trying to spoil grids here, Rob. It is soon and our commitment to bringing this forward is absolutely clear, as Nick and myself have—

Q851 **Chair:** Should there be at least some element of standardisation in home education? For example, home educated children could be assessed once a year and there could be clear minimum expectations about what children should cover.

Gavin Williamson: As part of the register we were not looking at doing that, but we are always open to it. As you rightly pointed out right at the start, the quality of home education is incredibly high right across the board. There are a lot of parents who put an awful lot of time, effort and resource into that, but the first key step is establishing this register. That is what we are going to be doing very shortly. It is a commitment that we have been clear on, and we are going to be delivering on it.

Q852 **Chair:** Thank you. I want to ask you about the Baker clause. We know that Lord Baker has an amendment in the House of Lords so that schools that fail to adhere to the clause could face legal action, sued by parents or providers. Do you think the proposals outlined in your “Skills for jobs” White Paper will be enough to sort out the problem or should there be a tougher statutory action? Last week we had Ofsted. We asked Ofsted about this. The chief inspector’s response, because of worries about enforcement of the Baker clause, was to ask what other things we would like to take out of the inspection so that the Baker clause can be enforced. I thought that it is wrong that Ofsted wants to cherry-pick this, and it suggested that it does not regard this as an important matter.

If you are to change, as you passionately want to do, build up the skills and apprenticeship nation and promote FE, surely there should be much tougher action to ensure that schools enforce the Baker clause. Our own recommendation in the white working-class report yesterday was that no school should get a satisfactory rating or above unless they implement the Baker clause properly.

Gavin Williamson: All schools should be delivering on the Baker clause. It is absolutely clear in guidance and they do need to deliver it. As you rightly highlight, in terms of the “Skills for jobs” White Paper it is something that we very much want to expand on, develop and get within



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the DNA, absolutely ingrained within schools right across the country. I am certain that we can do this.

Schools are usually incredibly open and willing to look at this because their interests are to deliver the very best for their pupils. My instinct would be to maybe hope that we would not have to be setting parents taking legal action against schools in order to do this. We have already seen changes and a clearer set of expectations of what schools are meant to be doing in order to drive that further forward. I do—

Q853 Chair: Do you think that Ofsted should not cherry-pick and should enforce this clause properly? What I want to know from you is: is there going to be tougher action from the Government to make sure that schools properly teach careers advice on apprenticeship skills, FE, and bring those organisations into the schools?

Gavin Williamson: I think Ofsted should absolutely be ensuring that schools are complying with Government policy. In the summer we are going to be consulting on proposals to strengthen the Baker clause legislation. As you rightly highlighted, this is part of a three-point plan as part of the “Skills for jobs” White Paper, alongside tougher formal action we intend to have against non-compliance and making Government-funded career support for schools conditional on Baker clause compliance.

This is a set of measures that could go a long way towards ensuring that every school understands the importance that—

Q854 Chair: Will you speak to Ofsted to make sure it does not cherry-pick this as it suggested last week and say to us, “What else would you like taken out of our inspections in order to enforce this?”

Gavin Williamson: I will be happy to do that. I very much hope that you and other members of the Committee will take part in the consultation, where we are looking at toughening what we do with schools to make it absolutely clear that the Baker clause is not an optional extra that they may wish to do, it is something that is absolutely expected of them to do. If they don’t do it, well, potentially they put funding in jeopardy.

Q855 Ian Mearns: I am interested in your response to Rob’s questions about the Baker clause and your instincts about schools doing the right thing by their pupils because, if that was universally the case, the Baker clause would not have been necessary in terms of that amendment to the 2017 Act, I believe it was. Why did a former Conservative Secretary of State for Education think it necessary to introduce the Baker clause if schools were instinctively, as you were saying, doing the right thing by all of their pupils?

The evidence was quite clear that they were not, but now we have a situation that Ofsted does not see it as a priority to make sure it is part of its inspection. I would back up what the Chair has been saying, Secretary of State, and say this is a matter of importance because it really does matter that youngsters are making the right choices and, in order to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

make the right choices, they need to be getting independent, impartial careers information, advice and guidance about progression opportunities.

Gavin Williamson: Ian, maybe it is a fitting moment—and I am sure you would want to join me as it is Thank A Teacher Day—to thank all teachers, who do an amazing job. I think that their commitment to the profession, especially at such difficult times, has been truly outstanding. I have yet to meet a teacher who does not at their absolute heart have the very best intentions and the desire to give the very best for their children.

You are right to flag—and Lord Baker was right to flag—that schools have not been delivering the best type of careers advice for, shall we say, non-university type routes for progression. That is why the clause was absolutely right, and I am incredibly grateful to Kenneth for introducing it. The fact that we are moving forward with a consultation on this, this summer, is also a recognition that we and the Department have that it is not being delivered in the way that I want to see it delivered and I think Kenneth wants to see it delivered. That is why we are taking the additional action in order to be able to drive this home to schools.

I would strongly defend schools. I don't think there is some malign intent and not wanting to necessarily do it, but it is really focusing the debate that it is something they have to do because it is in the interest of pupils, and it is vital for—

Q856 **Ian Mearns:** It is not malign intent, Secretary of State, but understandably, from their perspective and from the perspective of school managers, head teachers and senior staff in schools, because of bums on seats funding regimes, quite often they need from their perspective to retain pupils, who sometimes might be better served being directed elsewhere.

Chair: Yes, in a nutshell, please, Gavin.

Gavin Williamson: Basically, this is why we are moving forward with the consultation. We are putting more teeth to the Baker clause because I think creating the incentives and, also, the consequences for not doing it, is really important to be able to drive through to the system.

Chair: I am just going to bring David Johnston in on Ofsted. I have one other question and then I am going to pass to David Simmonds, if you could be patient, David Simmonds.

Q857 **David Johnston:** Secretary of State, we had Amanda Spielman before us last week and I raised the issue of Ofsted inspections because, obviously, there has been this period allowed without inspections due to Covid. I think everybody accepts that. I have schools in my own constituency that are living on an old Ofsted judgment where they know they have improved, and it would help their admissions if they could show that improvement to Ofsted. There are then the one in five schools



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that went into the pandemic, according to Ofsted data, as “requires improvement” or “inadequate”. Amanda has a concern about the outstanding schools. According to her, some of them will not have been inspected for 14 years. When I put this question to her, her view was that Ofsted could accelerate the timetable for inspections if it was directed to by Government. Is that something you are looking at?

Gavin Williamson: We would certainly be looking at a whole range of different options, including accelerated inspection. You are right to highlight the outstanding schools that have maybe been in the situation where they haven’t been inspected for 10 years or more. You are also right to highlight the schools that want to progress out of “requires improvement” into the “good” and “outstanding” areas. As we move out of this pandemic, we will be looking very closely as to what further action we can take to ensure that schools are best supported by Ofsted, yes.

Q858 **Chair:** Just before I pass to David Simmonds, another recommendation of our white working-class report, which was published yesterday, suggested dealing with teacher recruitment problems and helping to encourage teachers in disadvantaged areas by introducing an undergraduate teaching degree apprenticeship with a specific focus on developing teacher subject specialisms to help diversify routes into teaching. If we can have nursing undergraduate degree apprenticeships and we can have policing undergraduate degree apprenticeships, surely it is time to introduce teaching undergraduate degree apprenticeships.

Gavin Williamson: I think that you make a very compelling case.

Q859 **Chair:** Does that mean you would work up proposals to introduce teaching undergraduate degree apprenticeships?

Gavin Williamson: You can actually enter the teaching profession through a degree apprenticeship already.

Chair: Only if you have a degree first, an undergraduate degree. That is only if you have done an undergraduate degree, yes.

Gavin Williamson: I do think it is very important that we maintain high quality in the teaching profession but, in terms of the apprenticeship route and how we do that, we are always very keen and very open to looking at how we can expand that, yes.

Chair: That is very encouraging. Thank you. I think Jonathan Gullis—sorry, David—has a question on this point.

Q860 **Jonathan Gullis:** I would like to say, Chair, that while I am perfectly happy with teaching degree apprenticeships, I would like to make sure that there is subject specialism. It is all well and good learning how to be a teacher but if you do not have deep knowledge of your subject area that is going to make difficulties. I am sure the Secretary of State will want to comment on that.

Secretary of State, we focus a lot on recruitment; the issue is in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

retention. In our report we mention the idea of giving a one-off bonus to the best teachers to move to disadvantaged areas to improve the education outcome, which can obviously be evidenced. Is this something the Department will consider in order for the best teachers to be spread around the country?

Chair: I do not know if the broadcasting could help with Jonathan's speaker.

Gavin Williamson: Jonathan, you are absolutely right to highlight that different areas of the country—you can take Stoke-on-Trent—sometimes historically have had challenges in recruiting the absolute best teachers. A lot of coastal areas, such as Scarborough, Blackpool, various areas, are sometimes faced with real challenges of bringing high-quality subject specialist teachers into those communities.

We have been trialling retention programmes and I think, increasingly, we do need to look at the issue of how we drive incentives for some of the best teachers to be able to come to areas of the country, whether that be Stoke or Scarborough or other communities that sometimes have this historic problem, about how we look at doing that, yes.

Q861 **David Simmonds:** Good morning, Secretary of State. Just picking up on Jonathan's point, many schools run incentive schemes like that, which they are free to do. It may be something for the Department to highlight the fact that they have that freedom and to encourage it.

I want to ask, Secretary of State, about the Department's main estimates. What that suggests is that the catch-up funding that is proposed is going to be spread quite thinly. Many of us who have been engaging with schools have heard from head teachers particularly that children are less far behind academically than schools had feared but have lost a lot of their soft learning skills due to the lockdown period: the ability to work in teams, the ability to follow instructions in the classroom, and so on.

Do you feel there is an opportunity to think more flexibly about how that catch-up funding will be used, not just thinking about the per pupil total but how much of it is going to reach schools directly and how it can be deployed flexibly by schools so they can use it for the things they know will make a difference to the children in their school, as opposed to being too much centrally managed through the National Tutoring Programme?

Gavin Williamson: You raise an important point there, David. As we roll out the National Tutoring Programme and expand it as we go into next year, we are actually putting a lot of additional flexibilities into that so that schools are better able to deliver that for themselves on the ground. You rightly highlight the issue of some of the softer skills that children have missed out on. We do want to be able to help them. That is why we have given them the flexibility over the catch-up and recovery premiums, as well as the summer school programmes, to be able to devise



HOUSE OF COMMONS

something that isn't purely academic, that there is also something a little broader.

We do hope that as we evolve the tutoring programme, we have given that extra flexibility for schools to best be able to deliver that on the ground with the pupils' needs at the heart of it. Tutoring does work and it is incredibly important, and we do want schools to understand that that pocket of money is targeted at that because it can make such a big difference in children's outcomes, so we do want to steer their actions towards tutoring.

Q862 David Simmonds: Chairman, if I may, I have a follow-up question. Secretary of State, the Department has produced guidance in the past under the heading of character, which very much goes to the heart of this. It is about developing resilience and things like that. We know there are many organisations, ranging from the scouts to uniformed youth organisations such as the police cadets through to sporting organisations like the Football Association and rugby, that are keen to contribute to this.

Do you think there is scope, in line with your comments about the summer camp, for an almost great British summer camp, which is about giving children an opportunity, especially those who are going to be making the transition to secondary school or to a new stage of education, for whom those soft skills are absolutely critical to their readiness to learn perhaps through that route?

Gavin Williamson: The initial indications are a real high take-up from schools and an interest in the summer camps. We have had a vast expression of interest. I think over 80% of eligible schools have put in an expression of interest for it. Part of our guidance and advice is to say the value of targeting that at Year 7 pupils is really important, because we recognise how important that transition year is.

You are also right to highlight the work of other organisations. This is why we are expanding the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, not just in a fitting tribute to His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, but also the fact that it delivers quite simply so much for those youngsters who take part. I am not sure whether you, David, did your Duke of Edinburgh; you probably progressed all the way to gold, I imagine. I have seen it with my own daughter, the benefits that brings to her. You see it right across the spectrum. We want to expand DfE with the cadets programme. We are putting extra resource into the cadets programme, recognising especially in some schools, in some of the most disadvantaged areas, what an important part this is in terms of the development of character, confidence and the ability to be able to achieve the most out of their lives.

We are very much looking at expanding this. We certainly hope that the summer camps go a long way towards delivering some of what you have highlighted that you would like to see more of.



Q863 **David Johnston:** I have a final question on the money. Secretary of State, I am afraid the school I went to did not do things like the Duke of Edinburgh but I think things have changed since those days.

The Department's estimate in respect of the teachers' pension scheme, although we are still pursuing some figures on this, does imply significant resources being moved towards early retirement for senior staff, both senior and experienced, long-serving classroom teachers and others perhaps in the more middle management roles. Clearly, we will see that through Parliament being asked to vote for an additional sum to cover those costs. Does the Department have a view in respect of the teaching workforce about what more can be done—recognising that schools are the decision-makers in respect of employment matters—to improve the retention, particularly of those senior leaders? It may be expensive and, therefore, a burden on a school budget from one perspective, but in educational terms it is enormously valuable to the system.

Gavin Williamson: We often talk about how we recruit more teachers into the profession, but equally the other side of that coin, and just as an important part of it, is retention of brilliant teachers within our school system. This is why the investment in teacher quality is not just about how you help teachers at the start of their career, it is about how you help teachers all the way through and give them the proper career progression. We believe that by giving them much more structured career progression, the ability to be—I don't want to see teachers thinking the only way they can progress is to get out of the classroom. I want teachers to see that one of the key areas that they are able to progress is by being in the classroom delivering excellence in their subjects and specialist field.

It is certainly something that we want to grow because we want the average length of time that teachers stay in the profession to grow considerably. The best way of doing that is keeping teachers in there for longer.

Chair: David, if you are finished I am going to pass to Ian Mearns to talk about catch-up funding and the Education Recovery Commissioner.

Q864 **Ian Mearns:** The former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins, had allegedly called for £14 billion to £15 billion of education recovery package. How would you respond to Sir Kevan's suggestion that the Government's current education recovery package is a "half-hearted approach" that does not come close to meeting the scale of the challenge? Do you not think that this failure to meet this financial challenge for this recovery programme will simply badly exacerbate the levels of disadvantage gaps in learning and differentials in learning that we already knew about, particularly for poorest children?

Gavin Williamson: Ian, can I start off by thanking Sir Kevan for the work he did? It was a real pleasure to be able to spend so much time with him, working so closely in a whole range of policy areas, whether on teacher quality, the issue of the massive expansion of our tutoring



HOUSE OF COMMONS

programme or in the area of time and expansion of the school day. We have been in a position where we have been able to take two of those three areas forward very rapidly prior to a spending review. We are doing much closer work in terms of the time element and we are looking very closely as to how we can develop that, building up a greater body of evidence.

In June last year we announced a £1 billion package to help children in terms of catch-up. We saw earlier on this year a further £700 million and just earlier this month a further £1.4 billion. As the Prime Minister himself has said, this is part of that ongoing process.

We have to look very closely at the evidence of where the learning loss is and make sure that we craft the actions that are best able to deal with that learning loss.

Q865 Ian Mearns: You would disagree entirely with the reported £15 billion that Sir Kevan Collins thought was necessary in order to crack this particular problem? What you have talked about is the three different elements of funding that come to £3 billion, and Sir Kevan was talking about £15 billion.

Gavin Williamson: As you well know, it is quite unusual to make significant commitments in spending outside of a fiscal event, either a spending review or a budget. We have already committed over £3 billion. We have made quite clear our indication that we want to continue to invest and address this issue and that is what we are very much going to do.

Q866 Ian Mearns: Therefore, when you look at the international comparisons, do you think it is regrettable that England seems to be lower down the pecking order than many other developed countries by comparison in terms of what they have been doing with similar catch-up programmes?

Gavin Williamson: What we are seeing is the roll-out of one of the largest tutoring programmes anywhere in Europe, and it has been proven to deliver the biggest impact and the biggest gain for children who have suffered as a result of this. We recognise—as I know the Committee does—about driving high-quality teacher training and teacher development. That is absolutely at the core of the package and we all know that the quality of a teacher in front of the classroom is the thing that will have the biggest impact in terms of outcomes.

We recognise that there is further work that we are undertaking. That is why we are doing a further review of time as to how we can do that and what the further inventions are that we can undertake to drive attainment of all children across the country.

Q867 Ian Mearns: It is too early to tell what the actual educational outcomes are for children in all the different cohorts, all the different year groups, in terms of what they have had to suffer through learning loss during this particular period. Having not yet committed to spend the sort of money



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that Sir Kevan Collins was talking about, I gather you will be keeping a very close eye on all of the evidence as it comes in for some time to come regarding where children are across the board?

Gavin Williamson: I always at every stage try to take your advice and guidance, and we are absolutely doing that. As you are familiar with in terms of the renaissance learning project that we are doing, we are looking at very granular details as to where children are, what they have missed, and what the impact of the different lockdowns has been. That is not just at a national level but at a much more granular level as well, recognising some of the challenges that are there as a result of the impact of Covid.

Q868 **Ian Mearns:** Do you regret that Sir Kevan found it impossible to stay in the role that he was appointed to?

Gavin Williamson: As I said at the start, I found working with Sir Kevan a fantastic experience and we have been able to drive so much forward together, whether that has been on the tutoring or on the teacher quality elements. Of course, it is with sadness that Sir Kevan is not continuing to be able to work as closely as we have been doing.

Q869 **Chair:** Just before I bring in Christian and Jonathan Gullis, when we recently questioned the Minister for Schools he confirmed that just 44% of pupils enrolled into the catch-up tuition were eligible for the pupil premium. When you put out your press release on 19 June 2020 announcing the National Tutoring Programme you said, "It will increase access to high quality tuition for the most disadvantaged young people".

I accept that the non-pupil premium pupils have experienced other forms of disadvantage during lockdown, particularly mental health, and obviously should be supported, but how are you ensuring that every penny is going to the pupils who need it most? Is this even an explicit goal of the Department? Do you have statistics—obviously not with you at the moment—to reflect who is benefiting from the National Tutoring Programme and will you share them with the Committee?

Gavin Williamson: It very much is our aim to ensure that children who are most disadvantaged do get the most support. Obviously, that can often be reflective of economic disadvantage, but it is not always solely reflected as a result of economic disadvantage and the background that child comes from. It is very important that we have the ability for schools to have that flexibility as to who needs the tutoring most, but also the figures do bear out that a much higher proportion of children who are on free school meals in receipt of the pupil premium are actually receiving the tutoring programme than is the overall percentage—

Q870 **Chair:** Yes, but just 44% of them. It should be much higher; it should be 80% surely?

Gavin Williamson: The cohort you refer to amounts to 27%, or within a percentage or so within that, of a total school cohort. You are seeing a much higher rate of take-up within that cohort.



It is important that schools have the ability to make an assessment as to which children need it most. At every stage during this we have been consistent in making it clear that schools should be targeting and helping those children who are most—

Q871 Chair: The tutoring programme is strongly welcome and it should be acknowledged that you secured £3 billion from the Treasury to get this up and running. Is your priority to ensure that it reaches the most disadvantaged pupils or the majority of it reaches the most disadvantaged pupils? Is that your priority still?

Gavin Williamson: That is very much where we want it to be, helping those who are most disadvantaged.

Q872 Chair: On regional disparities, the National Tutoring Programme has only reached just under 60% of target schools in the north-east compared to 100% in the south-west. I have been told by my local Harlow education consortium that many of the schools contacted approved tuition partners only to be put on the waiting list. What is driving the substantial regional variation in the National Tutoring Programme? What are you doing to boost uptake in areas that have low representation?

Gavin Williamson: We are working very closely on a regional basis through the regional schools commissioner network where we had some schools that were not taking up this offer, working very closely with them to encourage them as much as we possibly can do to take up this offer. We did have lower rates of take-up in certain areas. We have been able to drive that forward by using our regional schools commissioners to push and promote that and make sure that schools are signing up to it.

Part of the development of the school-led tuition approach where there have been some objections to this approach is very much removing those objections so children across the board are getting the benefit from tuition.

Q873 Christian Wakeford: On the topic of the NTP, I believe it is Randstad that has been saying that the quality criteria is still currently being finalised and it is in discussions with DfE regarding that, despite the fact the contract with Randstad has already been published with that criteria in the contract.

Is the contract watertight and how will Ministers ensure this is not a race to the bottom in terms of quality and, therefore, make sure that certain charities and specialising companies, like the Tutor Trust, are not undercut or squeezed out of the NTP?

Gavin Williamson: The quality of tuition is at the core of it. Tuition only works if you have high-quality tutors. We have been working with Randstad and also Teach First to ensure that it is absolutely at the core of the proposal. One of the heaviest weightings that we had was the issue of the quality side of it because we needed that delivered. The only way that this can be delivered is through a broad range of providers.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

You mentioned a provider within your own constituency, but there is a whole plethora of providers that we need in order to deliver this and we need them to be part of that. We cannot be sacrificing quality for volume. This is also why we have made some changes around giving schools that little bit more flexibility in order to be able to develop their own locally led and developed tutoring schemes. That will also provide opportunities for smaller providers to be able to step into that and deliver at a school-led level as well.

Q874 Christian Wakeford: There has also been quite a bit of confusion in regard to pupils who have already accessed the NTP this year not being able to or eligible to access it next year. Is there a correct position from the DfE as to what they can and can't access with tutoring?

Gavin Williamson: Children will be in a position to potentially have more than one course of tutoring if that is what is deemed to be the right thing by the school.

Q875 Christian Wakeford: I have a final one around the flexibility of online and home tuition. Some charities do specialise in that kind of tuition, so in terms of the NTP what consideration is being given to those charities that focus on that as opposed to tuition in the classroom?

Gavin Williamson: One of the upsides of the disruption over the last year is how tuition online has developed so rapidly and how we have seen the positive impact it can deliver to youngsters. You are right, there are a number of organisations that specialise in it.

Christian, would it be possible to pick this up separately online? I can look into it and come back to you. Is that okay?

Christian Wakeford: I would be more than happy with that.

Gavin Williamson: If there are any specific ones I am happy to—

Chair: Okay, thanks. I will bring in Caroline, Jonathan and then Kim.

Q876 Dr Caroline Johnson: Good morning, Secretary of State. Delivering teaching online during the pandemic is most challenging for the very youngest students. Some have suggested that the younger students, building those basic literacy and numeracy skills on which all future learning will be put, have suffered the greatest learning loss. We are talking really about children in the years 1 and 2 at the moment.

What are you doing as a Department to ensure that those children who cannot really benefit so much from the online tuition achieve their potential?

Gavin Williamson: We go very much to the early years. You have seen children, very young children, having such a large proportion of their life not having the usual learning experiences that we would expect for a two, three, four year-old. This is why, as part of the recovery package, we concentrated such a large proportion of that in early years intervention. I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

personally think it is incredibly important and it is something that we probably do not talk quite enough about.

You are right to flag up the online tutoring. It is not going to deliver the best benefits in reception class. This is why we are trying to take a bit more of a targeted approach, whether that is through NELI, the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, recognising that we need to be putting those building blocks in place. We have made £153 million available for the early years settings to support the very youngest children in their early learning and development, recognising the exact problem and issue that you have highlighted.

Q877 Dr Caroline Johnson: That is very important and as a paediatrician I am particularly interested in the work that the Department is doing on early years. For those children who are past the early years and now into school, who missed out on or had a disruptive reception and are now having a disrupted year 1 or had a disrupted year 1 and year 2, those key stage 1 children, what are you doing to support those children who have missed out on a such a large proportion of key stage 1?

Gavin Williamson: This is part of the reason why, alongside the targeted tutoring initiatives, we put investment in terms of a recovery and catch-up premium, making sure that the money is available for schools in order to be able to target those initiatives at those children at very early stages.

Q878 Jonathan Gullis: While I absolutely support the intentions of the National Tutoring Programme, not only is it not necessarily reaching all the kids it needs to, but we have a major issue in recruiting tutors themselves. On top of that we then have the issue of making sure that we get quality tutors. I would like to hear from you, Secretary of State, what is being done to address that.

Gavin Williamson: If we think about a development of the tutoring market, historically this has been largely the preserve of some of the most affluent families in the country, and the range and depth of tutors has been limited to where the market has been. What we are doing is the largest single expansion of tutoring this country has ever seen.

We recognise we can't do that all directly through the National Tutoring Programme as a body itself. This is why we wanted to have that third route where schools were able to develop some of that capacity themselves, whether that is through existing high-quality, qualified staff or whether that is bringing in local provision that they may be familiar with and they can attest to the quality of.

What we are doing through the National Tutoring Programme has quality at the heart of it. In all of the discussions that we have with all the providers that want to come forward with it, it is about having the quality tutors, but we do recognise that to expand it at the level and in the range



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and speed that we want to do it at, we do need schools to be engaged in developing some of that quality provision themselves locally.

Q879 **Jonathan Gullis:** How are you measuring success from providers like the Education Endowment Foundation but also when schools are tutors?

Gavin Williamson: Jonathan, I do apologise, I just slightly lost you.

Ian Mearns: We have all lost him.

Chair: Jonathan, can you repeat your question? You cut off.

Jonathan Gullis: How do we get the best bang for our buck here? We are spending billions of pounds at the end of the day. How do we make sure that we are getting good value for money and how is the National Tutoring Programme being quality checked?

Gavin Williamson: We are doing very intensive evaluations. In spring 2022, we expect to publish the evaluation data that we have accumulated on this as we look at it. We recognise that this is a massive public investment by the Government and we want to make sure it is working well.

The year 2 evaluation will, again, focus on pupil attainment and progress and will also look at school teacher impacts and reasons for non-participation. We expect to see the results from the year 2 evaluation in January 2023. Obviously, we will be bringing interim findings as to what we gather. We are doing this on a very continuous basis, evaluating it, looking at how it works, looking at where take-up is. Hypothetically, if take-up isn't as high in Stoke, what are the reasons for this, what actions can we take, and what is the impact as well? We are looking at this in a very detailed way.

Q880 **Jonathan Gullis:** Sir Kevan Collins wanted an extended school day for half an hour, it is rumoured. I want it to be much longer than that. I think David Johnston has echoed sentiments in the Chamber similarly, and I know the Chair supports that. What is your view, Secretary of State? Do you want a longer school day?

Gavin Williamson: There are some schools that currently close far too early. Lots of schools do it brilliantly and we must not forget this, Jonathan, because the examples we pick on are schools that are doing exactly what we want to see, where you have the enrichment, the extra academic time. You have children with the opportunity to play at lunch time, be with their friends, do other activities. We have so many schools doing it, but we do, sadly, have a number of schools that are finishing too early in my view and I do not want to see that continue.

Q881 **Jonathan Gullis:** Do you have the figures, Secretary of State, for how many schools go beyond 3.30?

Gavin Williamson: I don't on me, no. Historically, there has been very little information published on the actual school day. As I am sure you are aware, it is part of something that has been looked at as part of an



HOUSE OF COMMONS

accountability measure by Ofsted. Over the last six months we have been doing more and more work looking at this and we are continuing to build up a lot more evidence of the real benefits of a long school day.

I feel very concerned when I see secondary schools closing at 2.45, sometimes even earlier, sometimes at 3 o'clock. I would like to see secondary schools going a bit further. A fascinating statistic: on average secondary schools are open for as long as primary schools, but in the post-16 environment the average amount of time spent declines. We are the only country in Europe where you see that difference. I think that presents some concerns and some worries as to why we are departing from—

Q882 Chair: On the longer school day, briefly, you have said that you were going to review the case for a longer school day ahead of the spending review. You suggested that physical activity should play a part in the education recovery. Just to understand, what plans do you have to drive forward the non-academic element of recovery, sporting activities, wellbeing, and how much of that will be made available for an extended school day?

Gavin Williamson: You see so many brilliant examples right across the country of where this has been done brilliantly well. A school I am going to visit over the next couple of weeks, a Thomas Telford School up in Shropshire, has a session 3, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. It is in a position where it is able to offer sporting and academic activities for youngsters.

Sport, team activities, as well as academia can all play a very important part in giving extra opportunities for youngsters, especially youngsters from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

Q883 Kim Johnson: Good morning, Secretary of State. I just want to pick up on some of the issues about quality and to ask you how you will ensure that 17 year-old Sri Lankan students are not paid £1.57 an hour to deliver this programme and to ensure that private sector companies, which are receiving large amounts of public funding, do not bolster their profits but make sure that those children we are talking about receive the support they need?

Gavin Williamson: As you will appreciate, we set incredibly high standards right across the National Tutoring Programme and will not hesitate to take action where there are particular concerns about this. We are insisting on stringent ongoing monitoring and will continue to do that with our new partner.

I personally have never taken a view that the private sector is bad. We want to work very closely with both private sector and public sector partners in order to deliver the very highest quality across the board.

Kim Johnson: Particularly in the private sector, which does not have a track record in delivering this type of service. Thank you, Secretary of



State.

Gavin Williamson: Maybe we have a different ideological point of view, but I have never taken the view that the private sector is bad. We could have a long debate about how important the private sector is to the prosperity of our country. I do not think we should be having a constant “downer” on entrepreneurs and the private sector, which employs the vast majority of my constituents and probably yours as well.

Chair: Kim?

Kim Johnson: That is the end of my question. Thank you, Chair.

Q884 **Fleur Anderson:** Good morning, Secretary of State. I would like to ask you about pandemic planning, the plans that were made and the plans that will be made.

The Public Accounts Committee report published in May of this year found that the Department for Education had no plan for dealing with an influenza-like disruption, despite being involved in the 2016 cross-government exercise, and was unprepared to deal with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Would you agree with this assessment? Were there plans? Was the Department unprepared to deal with the challenges of the pandemic?

Gavin Williamson: All Departments are very involved in cross-governmental planning and work in terms of all forms of civil contingencies. The Department engaged with all of those, as every Department is expected to do and wants to do.

In terms of Covid and the impact, we worked at incredibly high speed in a very rapidly changing situation. I remember in commissioning some of the first work, I think back on 13 January of last year, asking the Department to look at some of the challenges as a result of what was then a little-talked about strain in Wuhan, China. Obviously, the impact and speed of spread were far greater than I think any of us could have predicted, certainly with much more lasting consequences than there was any expectation it would have.

Q885 **Fleur Anderson:** There was a real scramble to move on to remote learning, which took some schools far longer than others, and the Plan A and Plan B for exams were hastily scrambled together through the year, and then again this year.

Experts now are saying there will be a third wave possibly next winter, and they are also talking about a wave of actual influenza outbreak next winter as well because that was suppressed last winter. Are there plans now in place for influenza-like disruption, for a future pandemic, for different scenarios, which will enable step-up remote learning so there is no scrambling around, there will immediately be different scenarios in place if we are going to have disruption to our education, to make sure we do not face this again?



Gavin Williamson: Fleur, you are absolutely right to say we still face many challenges and potential disruption in the future. That is why we continue to work across government and in the Department to make sure we have the contingencies there, whether that is with regard to ever having to shift back into non-classroom learning again. We have already made significant investment in digital technology, with 1.3 million laptops that have been procured and already sit within the school and college system.

In terms of assessment, I am unapologetic, I far prefer to see children sitting exams than having to be in the situation of teacher assessment determining their grade. However, we very much recognise we cannot predict what we are going to be facing over the coming years, but we do have the systems and we have much better understanding of the disease and developed scientific and medical understanding of the disease in terms of how to cope with it. That means that the ability to then stand up the systems of control is a lot easier because we have a lot more experience of how to deal with a pandemic. Of course, no one had experienced anything on this scale since the Spanish flu.

Q886 **Fleur Anderson:** Can you reassure teachers there is, somewhere, a big red file, or the equivalent, for the winter plans for the year ahead?

Gavin Williamson: Fleur, yes. I am desperately hoping never to have to touch it and I am sure you would never wish me to ever have to go near it.

Fleur Anderson: I agree but we definitely want to know those plans are in place for immediate step-up if they are needed.

Gavin Williamson: You are absolutely right. Also, Fleur, our understanding about how we run schools safely—with as many systems of control in place to protect staff and children—at the same time as them delivering a high-quality education has evolved dramatically over the last year and more, as it has done in all four parts of the United Kingdom and around the globe.

Q887 **Fleur Anderson:** I would like to move on to ask a question about mental health in schools. I met with a group of secondary teachers yesterday. I said I was meeting with the Secretary of State today and asked what the one issue is that they would like to raise. Unanimously, they all said, “Does the Secretary of State know about the mental health crisis in our schools?” I have also been talking to them in schools about their need to have funding.

I know there is £17 million of funding coming in for mental health. Will there be more in the Comprehensive Spending Review? Are you able to remove those barriers within schools that do not join up the systems, for example making sure that CAMHS appointments can be met by the school knowing, for example, there is a CAMHS appointment coming up so they can remind parents about that? It is those things within the system that are barriers to children across the country accessing the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

mental health care and support they need, both within schools and also in those services out of schools.

Gavin Williamson: Fleur, can I thank you for raising this? It is an incredibly sensitive subject. It is not just schools in Putney where head teachers and teachers are worried about this, it is something I think teachers across the country are worried about. It is also something parents and children are worried about.

We, obviously and quite understandably, talk a lot about education and education outcomes. You would not expect anything less of an Education Secretary than to talk about that. However, children have been deprived from some of those lived experiences and some of the support—and often the support of peers—to help them deal with things for large parts of this last year and more.

Thank you for acknowledging the £17 million, which includes £7 million for local authorities to deliver a wellbeing and education recovery programme. The bulk of the money, which I think is really important, is for schools and colleges to be able to train mental health leads. This really feeds on to how we can have interventions at the earliest possible stage. Most teachers did not go into the teaching profession in order to become mental health professionals, but teachers do a brilliant job in spotting some of the signs and concerns. Having those trained individuals within schools, who are able to have that better understanding and who are able to deliver a higher level of support, is really important.

I welcome the £79 million that has been earmarked from the Department of Health in terms of being able to increase support teams by 400 by April 2023. All this has to come together. How can we have the interventions earlier, hopefully in the school system, which mean we can divert people away from clinical interventions and having to use more access to CAMHS services? We all know how challenging it is often for pupils, parents and schools to be able to access CAMHS services. Can we get that intervention earlier to nip some of the problems in the bud at a lower level of intervention, which hopefully means we do not get that escalation? We are working really closely with the Department of Health on how we get a better flow through of youngsters being able to access CAMHS services.

Q888 Fleur Anderson: How many schools will have a mental health lead from September onwards? Do you know how many schools will not have that mental health lead? Will you know, and when, how many schools are missing out on that early intervention? I agree that is important.

Chair: In a nutshell.

Gavin Williamson: We are rolling this out as swiftly as possible. I think we will have been able to get training to roughly a third of schools and colleges that will be eligible for it by that stage. If you would not mind, I will come back to you to confirm. However, if I recall correctly, that is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

roughly the number. The constraint we have is the speed at which we can train.

Q889 Fleur Anderson: Yes, please. Two thirds missing out would be a concern.

I have one more quick-fire question about early years and state-maintained nurseries. This Committee talks about early years a lot, understandably. State-maintained nursery schools have real issues, being underfunded and much more being asked of them with Covid but not being funded. They really are the jewel in the crown of our early-years system, yet they do not get multi-year funding. Will you go in to bat for them in the Comprehensive Spending Review? Can they expect the increased funding they need? Will they have multi-year funding as well, not just relying on a year-by-year budgeting situation?

Gavin Williamson: Fleur, absolutely, yes, we will go in to bat for them. I am afraid you are asking me to predict a lot of the future. Obviously, if we have a Comprehensive Spending Review that will be a multi-year settlement, so I very much hope they will have that security.

Chair: Fleur, have you finished now?

Fleur Anderson: I have, thank you, Chair.

Chair: I am going to bring in Caroline and then Jonathan Gullis on GCSEs and exams.

Q890 Dr Caroline Johnson: I want to ask you about the upcoming GCSE and A-level results, Secretary of State. Last year it seemed to be accepted that exams were the best way of doing things and that the alternative was the best we had available in the circumstances. Unfortunately, you cancelled exams this year, and I understand why you did it.

However, how do you ensure children get a grade that meets their potential and that it is not undermined by everybody else also receiving a very high grade at the same time?

Gavin Williamson: Caroline, as I touched upon earlier, I would always want to do exams as a first, second and third preference. It was with incredible reluctance that we had to make the decision to cancel exams for a second year running. Looking across all the different routes we could take, we felt that teacher-assessed grades—putting our trust in teachers—was the absolute right and best route and approach in the situation we are dealing with. That is why we have put so much work into the guidance for training and support of teachers as they reach those teacher-assessed grades. It is also why—picking up on the issue you flagged up about concerns of difference and variability—we put so much work into the quality assurance process, both within the school, obviously making sure there is consistency across the school and in the internal quality assurance that is delivered, and also that the external quality assurance is delivered by the exam boards.

Q891 Dr Caroline Johnson: Last year the number of A grades went up from



HOUSE OF COMMONS

21.9% to 27.6%, with 300,000 more grades at GCSE delivered than the previous year. My understanding is that the exam boards received the information just in the last week. Do you have any sight yet of this year's results? What level of grade inflation do you expect this year?

Gavin Williamson: I have no sight whatsoever of results as to what it is expected to be.

Q892 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** What sort of grade inflation would you expect? What grade inflation would you consider reasonable?

Gavin Williamson: Caroline, what we are doing is we have made it absolutely clear there is a quality assurance process in terms of what happens within the school and also what is being delivered by the exam boards. We do not have data as to where we can see the inflation. Obviously, when you have many different centres and different schools submitting that information, it is not going to be feasible to be able to make that prediction. We will look at the data as it comes in.

We did make a decision that we are going to put our trust in teachers. I think we have recognised that all pupils have suffered an extensive amount of disruption over the last year and a half. Children—whether they have been doing GCSEs, A-levels or technical and vocational general qualifications—put in an enormous amount of work, had to deal with an immensely challenging time and put in that work.

Chair: Can we try to be more concise, everybody, thanks, particularly the Secretary of State? Thank you.

Q893 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Thank you. You are right that the assessments have been rigorous. In fact, some of my constituents, students and their parents, have suggested they have done more assessments and more hours of exam assessment than they would have done if they had just sat the exams in the first place and they have all been sat in exam conditions. Hopefully they will get a reliable grade.

Parents of students due to sit their exams next year are understandably worried whether their children will need to sit an exam next year, and whether their children's grades will look poor in comparison with this and last year's inflated grades compared with previously. How will you address that? What plans do you have in place for students sitting their exams this time next year?

Gavin Williamson: We very much hope and intend for exams to go ahead in 2022, as well as vocational and technical qualifications. We are considering what we need to do to ensure there is fairness and the right level of support for our pupils as they take these qualifications. I think that is the right approach. As you saw, we had an extensive package of measures that was intended for this year's awarding session and for supporting youngsters as they took their exams. We will look at having a similar set of measures that can be brought forward in order to support pupils as they take assessments.



Q894 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Secretary of State, do you expect adjustments to be required next year, the year after or the year after that, as has been suggested to this Committee by others?

Gavin Williamson: I very much expect there to be adjustments and mitigations put in place because those youngsters who currently are in Year 10 and Year 12 will have obviously suffered disruption as a result of the pandemic. Therefore, I think you do not have the situation of immediately switching back to the absolute same situation as it was back in 2019.

Q895 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I have one final question in relation to where these exam results lead. Last year there was an issue with the number of students achieving the grades for university being greater than universities expected, leading to pressure on places. That was particularly so for those with residential colleges within their university and where numbers are capped, such as medicine.

Do you have any indication on what percentage of places are currently already filled with students who deferred from last year and how that compares with the number of deferred students you would normally expect?

Gavin Williamson: The numbers are very, very small. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the university sector, which went to extraordinary lengths to be able to accommodate what was needed for pupils.

We have been working very closely with Universities UK and the Russell Group to ensure universities are able to meet the need. As you will be aware, there is also a demographic broad move to the university sector at the moment, with more pupils being able to and wanting to go to university. We are working very closely with them.

As you will recall, Caroline, last year we lifted the number of places in dentistry, medicine and veterinary sciences because of those capacity constraints within the NHS, so we were able to act in with that demand.

Chair: I am going to bring Ian in briefly on this point and then Jonathan Gullis.

Q896 **Ian Mearns:** It is on the issue of what happened last year, Chair. When we had Ofqual in front of us—I think in the autumn and then again in the spring—I did ask the schools Minister and Ofqual about releasing source data, which they told us they were going to do and get back to us. I am wondering what the latest on this is.

Recently, an Ofqual spokesman has said, "Our plans to share Ofqual, DfE and UCAS data with other researchers via the ONS secure research service have been delayed as we have some further data protection issues to work through". That is understandable but it is difficult for researchers out there to get to the bottom of what has been going on unless the source data is available to them. We have had undertakings it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

would be released and it is, yet again, delayed and we are a year on, Secretary of State. Could you have a word with Ofqual to see if that source data can be made available so people can find out exactly what has been going on?

Chair: Can you just say yes or no, Gavin?

Gavin Williamson: Yes, I can.

Chair: Thank you. Can I have Jonathan Gullis, please?

Q897 **Jonathan Gullis:** One of the concerns raised to me by schools is that they are having to pay the normal fees they would pay to exam boards, yet exam boards are not having to hire the examiners or staff that would normally come with it, due to the fact we are just doing grades. Do you think, Secretary of State, it is fair these schools and colleges are having to spend what is tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of pounds, depending on the size of these institutions, when all that money could instead be going on vital catch-up and enrichment activity?

Gavin Williamson: As you will be aware, Jonathan, exam boards are responsible for setting their fees. Exam boards are doing a considerable body of work. However, I would be expecting exam boards to be delivering a rebate to schools at the end of this process, as they did last year.

Q898 **Jonathan Gullis:** Do you share concern that some of the materials the exam boards put out to be used as part of the assessment that was going towards the evidence for students' grades were, in fact, recycled past paper questions rather than brand new ones? That meant some children—particularly those with sharp-eyed middle-class parents who would have had access to these online papers—would have been able to have a head start.

Gavin Williamson: I think what was so good was that there was such a broad range of information. Jonathan, if you are able to memorise 10 past years of, let's say, physics papers, frankly you are worthy of an A* in my view and I would happily give that to you. If you are able to do that sort of memory recall you are truly amazing.

Chair: He is a man of many talents, Secretary of State.

Jonathan Gullis: I can tell you now that I did single science for GCSE and only got a C, much to my mother and father's despair. A clip around the back of the head did me no harm when I was growing up. I did manage to get an A in maths, which was a shock to all the family.

This is not being tricky, I am really concerned about the grade inflation and the impact it has on future years. I think there are going to be an awful lot of year groups down the line, particularly disadvantaged kids, who are going to be massively impacted by this.

While I have you here, Secretary of State, I also think there is an issue with target grades. I really hate the Fischer Family Trust model, which



HOUSE OF COMMONS

determines at 11 what you are finally going to achieve at 16 and does not take into account all the different biological changes a person makes and it does not think about your family situation and how that changes. It is based on SATs solely for a dataset, not on the school you are going into and the quality of teaching provided. Can we please find an alternative to the Fischer Family Trust for target grades?

Gavin Williamson: You have made this argument a number of times before, with great passion and gusto. I think you have a point, we do need to step back and look at it. I will not profess to know the answer and to say we should absolutely take a different approach or whether this is absolutely the right approach. However, I am very happy to continuously keep this under review because we want to have the best set of metrics at all stages.

Q899 **Jonathan Gullis:** Finally, with exams, can we confirm—you may have already done it with Caroline, who I know is passionate about kids sitting exams—that next year, come what may, students will be sitting exams and we will not be doing any more of these teacher-assessed grades? I will shudder if I do not see kids back in exam halls again.

Gavin Williamson: Jonathan, I never want to see children not taking exams. I would probably have been so bold, if I was talking to you in December of last year, to say absolutely children would have been sitting exams, never recognising the fact there would be a new variant. That is absolutely our aim and our intention, with proper contingency plans always in place.

Q900 **Chair:** I am going to bring in Caroline again, briefly. However, I do not know if you have seen the recommendations from the Social Mobility Foundation; not the Commission, I am talking about Alan Milburn's Social Mobility Foundation. It is suggesting that all Governments should ensure that all Year 13 pupils can repeat a year if deemed appropriate by their schools, the Government must review the grounds available to appeal to account for specific challenges disadvantaged pupils have faced and also, in addition to covering the costs of appeals, all Governments must ensure all young people opting to take exams in the autumn instead of accepting teacher-assessed grades can do so free of charge. What is your view about its proposals?

Gavin Williamson: Sorry, Rob, I could not quite hear you on the first part of the question.

Chair: The first recommendation is that all Governments must ensure that all Year 13 pupils can repeat a year if deemed appropriate by their schools. The second suggestion is that the Government must review the grounds available to appeal to account for specific challenges disadvantaged pupils have faced. The third is that, in addition to covering the cost of appeals, all Governments should ensure all young people opting to take exams in the autumn instead of accepting teacher-assessed grades can do so free of charge.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Gavin Williamson: On the Year 13 point, we are already at that place. Youngsters in Year 13, if they choose to repeat a year, have the ability to do so. We ran the autumn series of exams last year. There was quite a lot of resistance to doing this but we had tens of thousands of students choosing to do those exams, and I think it is the right thing to do. There has been some resistance to the idea, again, of doing it but we have decided we are going to proceed with the autumn series. There is not a cost to the pupil if they decide to do that. I think we are there on a lot of what it has asked.

Chair: Caroline, then we are going to go to Tom Hunt. Apsana, sorry, did you have a question as well? No. Caroline and then Tom Hunt, please.

Q901 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Secretary of State, you will appreciate the amount of work teachers have put in over the last year or so, in particular the amount of work involved in doing these teacher assessments and the pressures teachers will be facing from their awareness of where a result will or will not enable their student to go on to their chosen university career, from parents and students keen to see particular results in particular subjects. What support is being offered to teachers who are under this pressure and to protect them from those who may seek to pressure them to deliver particular grades for their children?

Gavin Williamson: It obviously goes without saying that it will be completely unacceptable for teachers to be put under that sort of pressure. I would hope all parents are incredibly respectful of the fact that teachers are doing an amazing job, an incredibly challenging job, and that it is the best way of ensuring there is a fair, reasoned and evidence-based grade for their children in order for them to be able to progress.

We have recognised some of the challenges teachers are facing, including some of the mental health challenges. That is why we very much wanted to put in place some mental health support for the challenges they have been facing across the whole year as well.

We have been consistent for the grades that are submitted. A teacher is coming with that grade, but they are having internal quality assessment and also that external quality assessment. It is really important people understand and appreciate that because there has to be that rigour there in the assessment.

Chair: Thank you. We are going to have to move on because we want to finish, obviously, for Prime Minister's Questions. I am going to bring in Tom Hunt now, please.

Q902 **Tom Hunt:** Thank you, Secretary of State, for being with us today. This is to deal with the results this year. Evidence suggests that SEND pupils may be downgraded in teacher assessments. What plan does the Department have to evaluate whether this year's teacher assessments have disadvantaged pupils with SEND or any groups whose grades may



have been downgraded by unconscious teacher bias? If so much of what is going to go into the grades this year is going to be classroom-based assessments and so on, we do know that many pupils with SEND are unconventional learners, they learn in a slightly different way and may not always operate in the same way as peers in the classroom, for example, and some actually do quite well in exams. I want to know what your thoughts are on that.

Gavin Williamson: It is really important that reasonable adjustments are made for disabled students and access arrangements should have been in place when the evidence is generated. Where they are not, centres need to take all this into account in their judgments.

Teachers also have the advantage of having flexibility to substitute or discount evidence where reasonable adjustments have not been applied. This is part of the reason why it is so important in terms of teacher assessment, because those teachers are going to have the best and clearest understanding of the ability and strengths of their pupils in the areas they are working in.

We have also seen a lot of work in terms of, as you mentioned, unconscious bias. A lot of schools are going to incredibly great lengths in order to be able to mitigate this and put in place measures to ensure there is not any form of bias against any pupil, whether that is in regard to disability or anything else.

Q903 **Tom Hunt:** That is good to hear because a lot of pupils who may have autism or other disabilities like that may be slightly unorthodox or unconventional and may not thrive in the classroom setting but often can surprise their teachers in exams, which they are not going to have the fullest chance to do this year. It is making sure that does not disadvantage them.

Gavin Williamson: You are right to flag this up. As I say, the best form of assessment is exams. When we are not in that situation the right thing to do is to flag up some of those groups that could potentially be disadvantaged by not having an exam to make sure that the teaching profession has a clear understanding and is able to mitigate against any potential negative impact any groups could suffer.

Q904 **Tom Hunt:** I have a question here about Ofsted, because obviously in the not too distant future we are going to be going back to full inspections of schools and so on. My point is about the way in which special schools are assessed by Ofsted inspectors, about how SEN provision within mainstream schools is assessed by Ofsted inspectors and the extent to which you, as Secretary of State, are confident that within Ofsted there is the in-depth expertise and knowledge with regard to SEN provision—what counts as good SEN provision and what does not. I know some teachers who are involved in special schools would prefer it if the inspectors were specialists in assessing and coming to judgments about special schools, because, of course, assessing a special school is very



different from assessing a mainstream school. There is some concern in the sector that it is bit of a one-size-fits-all when it comes to the type of inspector who is dispatched to assess a school.

Gavin Williamson: You are right to flag this up. This is why we have commissioned the CQC and Ofsted, with the support of the Department of Health and Social Care, to develop a new area of SEND inspection framework to be launched when the existing cycle finishes. The aim is that this will have a much greater focus on the experience of children and young people with special educational needs and, importantly, their families and also the commissioning of the right type of work. You are right to highlight that there are different experiences and there sometimes needs to be a different understanding. Ofsted is conscious of this. That is why we have commissioned this work together to see if we can continually improve things.

Q905 **Tom Hunt:** This is my final point, Chair. I have spoken to many teachers who are passionate about what they do in terms of supporting young people with special educational needs. However, many of them do feel the Ofsted framework almost works against them and there are not enough positive incentives or premium put on putting effort into providing first-class SEN provision. Sometimes they almost feel as if they are disadvantaged and it counts against them.

Gavin Williamson: That is certainly the last thing we would ever want to happen, Tom. We certainly do not want to be creating frameworks that disincentivise people from delivering high-quality special educational needs provision. Maybe we could sit down separately and have a discussion as to what it is that can be done and changed to improve that, certainly getting rid of disincentives.

Tom Hunt: Thank you, Secretary of State. I would like to do that and I will be in touch with you. Thank you for your time and for answering my questions.

Chair: Thank you, Tom. Fleur, can you do the question as quick as you can, please? Then I am going to come on to Christian, please, and Ian.

Q906 **Fleur Anderson:** I would like to ask a question about university funding. In the last financial year universities lost out on £790 million through conference provision that they would normally have in income, from different funding and the lack of students coming from foreign countries. They are, therefore, facing significant funding problems.

There are reported proposed cuts of 50% to arts programmes. Is there a bias against arts provision by universities within the Department? Will you be ensuring we do keep high standards of arts and humanities provision? There have already been cuts, for example, in my own constituency at the University of Roehampton, which they did not want to have. There have been cuts already. Will this be continuing across the country or will you be able to secure continued funding of high-class education provision?



Gavin Williamson: What we have seen is that universities have a lot of exposure to commercial income from conferencing and everything else in that area, which is not effectively public sector income that is supporting them. They have been able to access the Government support mechanisms to be able to help them with that. There was a lot of concern this time last year about the financial sustainability of the university sector. We have had a very positive year in terms of people coming to this country from international destinations. While we have seen a decline in the number of EU students coming, we have seen very positive growth in other parts of the globe that have always historically attracted higher fee incomes for universities.

To be absolutely clear, there is certainly no bias against arts qualifications. I am sure you probably also noticed the amount of funding we are giving to the small and specialist, the very best, institutions and organisations—such as the Royal College of Music and many others—that are not just known in this nation as being the world’s best but around the globe as being the world’s best. We have seen an enormous increase of funding in this area because we want to drive the arts, drive the very best and highest quality in that. We see a massive uplift in funding of these institutions as a really important part of being able to deliver for them to grow this sector.

Q907 **Fleur Anderson:** These are false rumours about cuts to arts courses?

Gavin Williamson: The figures you mentioned are completely false. It probably does not totally surprise you, but the OfS is doing a consultation in terms of changing the profile, moving from the T-Grant to the Strategic Priorities Grant, where some arts courses and areas will not be getting as much money through the Strategic Priorities Grant.

Chair: Thank you. I am going to bring in Christian and Ian, then I think Kim has a couple of supplementaries. I will bring you in after them, Kim.

Q908 **Christian Wakeford:** The lifelong learning entitlement, which obviously is a hugely important policy, was allowing adults to apply for a loan for the equivalent of four years of post-18 education. However, it is unlikely this is going to be introduced by 2025. Considering the Covid recovery, is this timeframe too long and what can be done to speed up this process?

Gavin Williamson: Christian, I am like you, I am massively impatient and I would love it to be introduced tomorrow or next week, or certainly in 2022. It is largely a logistical thing. First, we have to get the legislation to be able to underpin it. As you will see with our skills Bill, it is the largest reshaping of post-16 education since the Second World War so we do have to have a legislative underpinning. To get it in place from a deliverability point of view, the earliest point that we are able to deliver it with absolute confidence is 2025. If there is some way of being able to do it earlier and we could get it earlier, believe me I would absolutely love to do it. Please, ideas on postcards sent to me.

Q909 **Christian Wakeford:** Thank you. It is also estimated there are roughly 9



HOUSE OF COMMONS

million people in the country who either have difficulty in reading or are unable to read. How do we intend to target these people to be able to access this very vital funding, so they can achieve the most they are able to do?

Gavin Williamson: Sorry, Christian, I have lots of sirens in the background here and my hearing is not very good.

Christian Wakeford: I will repeat the question quickly. There are roughly 9 million people who either cannot read or have difficulty in reading. How are they going to be able to access this funding so they can achieve the qualifications they are able to do?

Gavin Williamson: This is recognition that this is a lifelong need. There are lots of people through their career where the decisions that maybe they are making at 17, 18 or 19 are not the right decisions for when they are in their early 30s, 40s, 50s or older. We are recognising this is about a lifelong learning entitlement to take people through different stages of education.

One of the great tragedies in our education system is we have less people doing education. The number of mature students and the number of part-time students has declined, and the number of people doing modular learning has gone down. We absolutely have to reverse that. Part of that is tapping into those 9 million people who have not had maybe the same educational opportunities you and I benefitted from as we went through our childhood and giving them another opportunity.

Chair: Christian, are you done?

Christian Wakeford: I am done there, thank you, Chair.

Chair: Ian, are you able to do yours swiftly?

Q910 **Ian Mearns:** Very quickly, yes. Thinking about those very people you have just been talking about, Secretary of State—those people who are trying to catch up on learning, doing training, apprenticeships or FE courses in adulthood—what is being done by the Department in terms of them catching up on the lost learning over the last year and their lost training opportunities?

Gavin Williamson: You have probably not seen, Ian, in the last 30 years any Government, of whatever colour, put a greater emphasis in terms of learning through people's lives, technical and vocational skills, the opportunity for people who maybe missed out on doing the Lifetime Skills Guarantee where someone does not have a Level 3 qualification, at any point in their life have been able to turn back and—

Q911 **Ian Mearns:** As you have just said, Secretary of State, we have fewer people doing all of that stuff now. Therefore, how can you say you have put a greater emphasis on it when we have fewer people engaged in the process?



Gavin Williamson: Ian, in fairness, so many of these schemes that we are driving forward are coming online now and today. We are delivering the biggest change in post-16 education than we have ever seen before. Whether it is in your constituency or my constituency, both former coalmining constituencies, you have a lot of people who have a brilliant skill set but who sometimes need additional skills to overlap them in order to be able to access the jobs market.

Chair: Thank you. I am going to move on now to David Johnston, please.

Q912 **David Johnston:** Secretary of State, as usual young people are hit hardest by the recession that we have seen as a result of covid. ONS figures said 80% of the people who lost their jobs were under 35 and two-thirds of them were under 25. Do you think the Skills Bootcamps are going to be enough to deal with this problem and how will you be measuring the success of them?

Gavin Williamson: The key thing is how they then lead into work and employment, which is the core measure in terms of their success. Whether it is Kickstart or whether it is the bootcamps, we are working incredibly closely with the Department for Work and Pensions and their teams in jobcentres up and down the land and their job coaches. We are seeing incredibly healthy interest in this because there is recognition that this is sometimes the best way to be able to get into employment.

If we take some of the bootcamps, it is not just the actual course that is being offered, it is the fact that we have changed so much around it because now Treasury and DWP have meant that people are able to continue to be in receipt of their benefit, even if it is a very, very long course they are having to do. The feedback from employers is that they are getting people who are job ready out of it. That might immediately lead them into an apprenticeship to take them through the next two years of training. What it does mean is that they are able to go into a job and then start doing that job, so have a real economic worth. The true measure of this is how it will lead people into employment.

I am always unabashed by this. Education, training and skills should all be about giving people the skills they need in order to be able to provide for themselves and their families in a place of work.

Q913 **David Johnston:** I have one other question on this, which is going back to what Fleur was asking about courses. There is some concern about funding for arts courses and so on because they do not obviously lead to better employment outcomes in the way some other courses do. However, do you agree there is a broader issue about how institutions, particularly universities that are charging such high fees, prepare their students for the world beyond university? They are very good at getting people in, getting that £9,000 per year, but some of them are not very good at then developing the employability skills of students so they get a better job at the end of it.



Gavin Williamson: I would expect every vice chancellor to take as one of the things of greatest pride how many of his or her students are leaving his or her institution and going straight into high-quality work, which demonstrates that doing that job has been able to open doors for that student. That should always be a focus in terms of the onwards progression of every single university. If they are not achieving that then, in essence, I think they have to ask very searching questions of themselves as to whether the quality of the education they are giving that student is right and whether the support around that student is right in order to be able to help them progress on to the next stage of their life.

Q914 **Apsana Begum:** Thank you, Secretary of State. I wanted to ask a question about the Ofsted review into sexual abuse of children in schools. The Women and Equalities Committee in 2016 found tackling sexual harassment in its early stages can prevent more serious forms of sexual offence. Ofsted's 2021 review highlights that sexual harassment and abuse is still commonplace in schools.

Do you think, Secretary of State, the Women and Equalities Committee 2016 report should have been acted on earlier, either by Ofsted or by the Department for Education?

Gavin Williamson: Can I put on record my thanks to Ofsted for conducting the review so swiftly and so thoroughly? The Government have accepted its finding. We are considering the recommendations for schools, Government and also local safeguarding partners, and the Government will look at going much further.

I think this is the right thing to do. However, we also have to ask some broader questions that are a little bit out of the hands of schools and teachers, which is the role of social media and internet companies as well. The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Oliver Dowden, and myself have asked the Children's Commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza, to do a report on this, to look at some of the real pressures that have been placed on youngsters, and especially a lot of young women. I feel deeply uncomfortable about this, whether it is the availability of pornography to children, and we do not see this as—

Apsana Begum: Secretary, can I ask—

Gavin Williamson: I will be very brief. We have always said this has been completely unacceptable, for children to be able to procure pornography in a retail environment, and I think it should absolutely be as unacceptable for children to have access to it on the internet.

Apsana Begum: Chair, I appreciate there is a lot less time we have on the Committee but I do have a few questions on this section that I would like to go through.

Chair: We are going to have go on beyond PMQs.

Q915 **Apsana Begum:** Thank you. Secretary of State, just on that, schools are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

saying it is not just down to them in terms of safeguarding, there are limitations. Ofsted—we had Amanda Spielman come to us very recently, as you no doubt will be aware—was also talking to us about not necessarily having enough powers to intervene. Where is the responsibility for safeguarding? Where should it lie?

Gavin Williamson: Safeguarding has to be something that everyone plays their part in and that is what they do. Schools have made incredible strides forward. However, what the Ofsted review also highlighted is that there is also more to be done. Statutory guidance is absolutely clear on what teachers and school staff should be doing to keep their pupils safe.

Q916 **Apsana Begum:** Sorry, Secretary of State, the problem that we are receiving on the Committee is that everyone seems to have limited ability and powers to act. I appreciate what you have said about online harms. However, to me it does not seem very clear and to us, as a Committee, it is not very clear in terms of who has the powers and where the responsibility should be to protect young people from sexual harassment at those very early ages in school environments. I appreciate what you have said, Secretary of State. However, can I ask two more questions on this?

The review has come out with a couple of recommendations. One of the things the DfE has pledged is to encourage schools to include RSE curriculums and safeguarding guidance training as part of national staff INSET days. Is that enough, in your view, to tackle this issue?

Gavin Williamson: Was there a second question?

Q917 **Apsana Begum:** The second question is about Ofsted. Do you think it has enough powers to intervene, monitor and regulate schools, particularly academies and independent schools, on matters where they need to regulate, inspect and monitor? A lot of the cases that arose out of the Everyone's Invited website were institutions that are either not regulated or are academies and are not within the scope. Again, it goes back to this question of where the responsibility lies and what interventions can be made where some of these institutions fall outside of what seems like the influence of the DfE or Ofsted.

Gavin Williamson: For clarity, academies absolutely do fall within the remit of Ofsted. I am not sure if you are referring to independent schools, which would have the Independent Schools Inspectorate to check them.

As part of the Ofsted review, I think there is a high degree of self-assessment there. There was a recognition there is more that could be done and in different ways, both through Ofsted and ISI. We will be working with both the ISI and Ofsted as to how we deliver on that so there is a check.

In terms of INSET days and that training, it is right to expect schools to dedicate one of those days to doing that sort of staff training so there is a clear understanding of that. I do not think that is a disproportionate ask.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

We will be expecting and looking to see that that is rolled out in all schools.

Q918 Apsana Begum: Thank you. In terms of what you have said about online harm—I appreciate the Bill is going through in Parliament—what other measures do you think can effectively counter negative messages about relationships, especially for 11 to 16 year-olds?

I appreciate you cannot comment on specific cases but I wanted to highlight the case of Semina, a young lady, 12 years-old, who disclosed that she had been raped by a school classmate of hers and who committed suicide last week. This is in one of our schools in Southport. It shows the seriousness of this, the prevalence of the issue and the need to tackle it from different angles.

It would be helpful to understand from yourself what other measures—aside from dealing with online pornography, the prevalence and availability of that—there are to tackle this issue, aside from the Online Harms Bill.

Gavin Williamson: The case—I am not familiar with the details of the case—highlights the devastating impact this can have on people’s lives. Whether it is the Online Harms Bill, this is the importance of making sure this area is properly managed.

This is why the new RSE curriculum is so incredibly important, instilling an understanding of respect right across all school ages and making sure pupils always have a clear understanding of what is and is not acceptable.

Chair: Thank you, Apsana. I have to move on now, unless you have a desperate last question.

Apsana Begum: I will come back to it later, Chair, thank you.

Chair: If it is about this, ask it.

Apsana Begum: It is about registered schools but I can come back to that at the end, Chair.

Chair: If we have time. Can I bring in Tom Hunt, please, on higher education?

Q919 Tom Hunt: It is to do with the new free speech laws and whether the new free speech legislation might mean those who have views that are hateful and abhorrent but not unlawful may be able to claim compensation if they are blocked from speaking on university campuses.

Gavin Williamson: No, they will not. What we have seen in terms of the free speech Bill—

Chair: Can you speak a bit louder, Gavin? Sorry, I think it has gone very quiet.

Gavin Williamson: Chairman, I will definitely speak louder. No, we do not believe that will be the case. The current legislation effectively takes



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the legal definition and understanding of free speech, and whereas there has always been an obligation on universities to do this there has never been any legal enforcement. If we take holocaust denial, whether it is the Equalities Act or the Prevent duties, they mean holocaust denial is something that would never be tolerated on university campuses because it is antisemitic behaviour, would not be allowed and it would not be the case.

Q920 Tom Hunt: Thank you very much, Secretary of State. Extending that free-speech angle to schools, I understand that the European Convention on Human Rights does say things on free speech, what is allowed and not allowed within schools. At what point as the Secretary of State would you deem something to be so damaging—if it was a contested term or ideology and it was being promoted in a school—that you would feel you would need to intervene? What would be the trigger point? I understand it is a balancing of free speech, but if you saw something being promoted within a school that you thought was damaging, at what point would you think it was appropriate to intervene?

Gavin Williamson: Schools, as has been defined by law for more than three decades, are meant to be, and should be, politically impartial spaces. While we should always have tolerance and understanding of different arguments and viewpoints and a good understanding of a situation, schools are there to create space for children to learn. They are not there to be a political space. That is why back in the 1980s this legislation was passed and it is absolutely expected that schools adhere to it.

Q921 Tom Hunt: If, for example, there is a contested term—such as “white privilege”—which you deemed was potentially not appropriate and quite damaging to certain pupils, would you think that might be an appropriate point where as a Department you could intervene and tell a school it was not appropriate for that term to be promoted, and if it is promoted for it to be done in a certain way that is not politically partial?

Gavin Williamson: Schools have to be politically impartial. There is no space for schools to be showing political views or trying to push that in any form or way whatsoever. That is something that needs to be always remembered. As the development of curriculum resource is done the legal duties should always be properly regarded by that school and by that school leadership team.

Tom Hunt: Thank you, Secretary of State. That is me done.

Chair: Thank you. Can I bring in Jonathan Gullis on antisemitism? Before I bring in Jonathan, I thank you for the letter you sent about dealing with antisemitism to every school. I think it meant a lot to the Jewish community.

Q922 Jonathan Gullis: Secretary of State, in a letter to university vice chancellors in October 2020 you said, “If I haven’t seen the overwhelming majority of institutions adopting the [IHRA] definition by



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Christmas, then I will act". What action did you take, and are you planning on introducing penalties for universities that do not subscribe to the IHRA definition?

Gavin Williamson: We expect all universities to bow to the IHRA. I have been working closely with Lord Mann—I am sure you are familiar with his work across government—in order to ensure that all universities sign up to the IHRA. We have had an exceptionally large rise in the number of universities that have signed up. I continue to work with Lord Mann to ensure that some of those slow responders do that. We have worked with those universities. Some of them have required a little bit of extra time. If there is a complete reluctance to be able to do this we will look at taking other actions that may be available. Obviously, universities are independent and autonomous institutions, but Government do fund universities in certain ways, so we would look at a broad group of connections. However, the take-up has been excellent.

Chairman, in terms of the comment about the letter, I felt it was particularly important that we made it absolutely clear to all schools. We do want to protect all communities, including the Jewish community. I was particularly concerned by some of the scenes. I am very grateful to schools for how they have responded and acted as a result of that letter.

Chair: Thank you again for that letter.

Q923 **Jonathan Gullis:** Sorry, Chair, I have one more. I was criticised by the Member for Warwick and Leamington for having criticised Dr Goldie Osuri at Warwick University, who used an antisemitic trope with her students, saying antisemitism in the Labour party was a Jewish conspiracy. She was investigated by someone who did not subscribe to the IHRA and who said it was wrong for universities to sign up to it. Stuart Croft, the vice chancellor of Warwick University, continually ignored the voices of Warwick University Jewish students.

Do you think that universities such as Warwick should be held to account for its failure to its community? Is it not time that university lecturers are held to the same standards as a classroom teacher?

Chair: To add to that, you are obviously aware of the very controversial situation at Bristol University with its lecturer who has been accused of significant antisemitic statements and yet nothing has been done by Bristol University. In fact, as I understand it, it brought him back to teaching.

Could you answer both questions together?

Gavin Williamson: Jonathan and Rob, I am not as familiar with the case of Warwick University so I would rather not comment in too much detail.

I would never expect a university to tolerate racism and I would never expect a university to tolerate antisemitism. Where there is racism, whether that is manifested in antisemitic remarks, I would naturally expect there to be a proper and full employment procedure. However, I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

would not expect any form of racism, including any antisemitism, to be tolerated and I would expect those people who are committing acts of antisemitism to be dismissed from the staff.

Chair: Thank you. Is Kim still on the call? Okay, can I have Apsana, please?

Q924 **Apsana Begum:** It is a really quick question, Secretary of State, about the Department's "Regulating independent educational institutions" consultation—which, of course, proposed to give Ofsted new powers to regulate and close unregistered schools—that concluded over six months ago. Are you able to say what we can expect on the next steps and when?

Gavin Williamson: Apsana, I do apologise, I cannot quite at the moment. It will be soon but I am afraid I cannot give you the exact week.

Chair: Thank you. Ian Mearns, and then I have one final question.

Q925 **Ian Mearns:** Secretary of State, earlier, when referring to Fleur's questions, you said you had a red file that you did not want to have to go near. If planning for future phases of the pandemic or for future influenza outbreaks are already made, why do you not publish them, share them with the sector, have them challenged and tested and hopefully validated by the sector?

Gavin Williamson: In the development of policy, we always work closely with the sector, whether that is trade unions or other representative organisations. We do, in terms of all policies, share it with an extensive working group to test that.

If we were in another pandemic and we were then having to bring schools back, the types of controls and restrictions that would be in place will be very similar to the types of controls and restrictions that are currently in place in order to be able to ensure the safe return to schools. Whether it is through the contingency framework—we have always shared that very broadly—or some of the enhanced measures that can be taking place in different areas of the country, these are all public documents and are all shared.

Q926 **Ian Mearns:** If these are all public documents but are shared in a different way with different people, why not do a compendium exercise so the whole sector will have absolute confidence, should anything like this ever happen again, that the plans are robust and are ready to go so there is no doubt about it? There will be a public inquiry as to how the Government have conducted the whole management of the pandemic. However, if those plans are already prepared, for goodness' sake, Secretary of State, share them; transparency, please.

Gavin Williamson: Ian, if you go to any one of the schools in your constituency you can ask to see their outbreak plan, which of course has been informed by the guidance and information that we give every single school to say, "This is how you deal with it". Every single school across



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the country is obliged to have an outbreak plan. This is built up on the basis of the information that we give and share with those schools, so if there is an outbreak in your constituency or mine there is an immediate resource that schools go to in order to be able to deal with an outbreak and a pandemic. That is already there. They are documents I am sure your schools will be willing to share, which are based on the information and the guidance we give them.

Q927 Chair: Can I finally ask you—you will be pleased to know, Secretary of State, because it has been bit of a marathon session—going back to FE and the skills Bill—I personally am quite excited about what is being proposed for the most part—whether it is right you are proposing in the Bill to divide the qualifications regulation between Ofqual and IfATE? If that is the case, why on earth do that? Why not just give regulation of the qualifications to IfATE, which is one of the reasons the organisation was set up for?

Gavin Williamson: It is much more of a tidying-up measure as against anything too radical. We want to be able to give additional functions to IfATE to enable it to define new qualification categories and approve a broader range of technical qualifications, to basically lay the foundations to allow T-levels to be delivered outside England. I think T-levels are absolutely brilliant.

Q928 Chair: Why have two bodies regulating the qualifications, why not just have one?

Gavin Williamson: We are asking the two bodies to do slightly different needs. One of the challenges is that before IfATE existed there was a lot of concern within the technical and vocational qualification sector and through apprenticeships that there was not the same level of focus that Ofqual brought. By having a dedicated body we feel as if we can give it a lot more attention.

Q929 Chair: Why not just give it to IfATE to do that, as a dedicated body?

Gavin Williamson: We feel as if we have reached the right balance between IfATE and Ofqual. I will always be very happy to sit down with you, Rob, to talk through the details of it if you feel as if there is a real challenge there. However, we felt as if we had struck the right balance in order to be able to give IfATE all the powers it properly needs in order to deliver the work it needs to do. I always accept people will have different views. IfATE also seems to have the confidence and belief it has the tools it needs.

Q930 Chair: Why not just give them the responsibility for it, why have Ofqual as well?

Gavin Williamson: Because there are areas of crossover. We have two organisations that are looking at slightly different sectors but there is crossover. We expect those organisations to work in harmony and close



HOUSE OF COMMONS

co-operation together. I think that is something that can be done and can be achieved.

Q931 **Chair:** Finally, you said it was Thank A Teacher Day. We should, as a Committee, do Thank A Teacher Day. I would also like to add we should thank support staff; there should be a Thank Support Staff Day. I always think support staff get forgotten and yet are responsible for so much that goes on in schools. On behalf of the Committee we thank a teacher and thank support staff as well.

Secretary of State, thank you for a marathon session and for all you are doing. I really appreciate you being accountable to the Committee today.

Gavin Williamson: Thank you for having me. They are never sprints, are they, Rob?

Chair: This was a particularly long one.