



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [The impact of Covid-19 on education and children's services, HC 87](#)

Tuesday 13 July 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 July 2021.

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; David Johnston; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds.

Questions 1433 - 1516

Witnesses

I: Leigh Powell, National Officer for Further Education, UNISON; Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary, National Education Union (NEU); Geoff Barton, General Secretary, Association of School and College Leavers (ASCL); and Darren Northcott, National Official for Education, NASUWT.

Written evidence from witnesses:



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Leigh Powell, Kevin Courtney, Geoff Barton and Darren Northcott.

Q1433 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and thank you very much for coming today. We have a fair few questions. We may not ask each of you to answer every question. We may direct questions at one of you or a couple of you.

I am going to start with you, Geoff, please. Last week you were quoted in *The Times* as saying that you agreed with the removal of the restrictions. You said, “We have to put an end to the educational disruption that has blighted the lives of children and young people during the pandemic and it simply would not be fair to them to continue with the current controls when the adult population is largely vaccinated”. Can I confirm that that is your view and that you welcome the lifting of school restrictions and things getting back to normal by September?

Geoff Barton: What I was talking about specifically was bubbles. Bubbles were introduced for very good reason—to stop the amount of mixing within a school or in a college—but that has become hugely counterproductive. What I was saying is that you simply cannot have 530,000 children at home not because they have Covid but because they may have come into contact.

That does not mean that from September there should not be some measures. It would be important, to build reassurance, that there were some measures. We can debate what those are. We certainly look forward to saying goodbye to the bubble system. The only important message that did not get through clearly enough last week, which has caused some discord between some parents and some leaders, is that none of this starts until 19 July. It is important that we know that these things are right at the end of term, and that to all intents and purposes we are talking about bubbles disappearing from September.

Q1434 **Chair:** You said previously that you are sceptical about masks. Do you agree that it is right that children should not need to wear masks when they come back in September?

Geoff Barton: All the way through this, Robert, what I have tried to do is to keep on educational territory. Frankly, if scientists say that masks are a way that we are protecting each other and symbolising our respect for other people, schools are good places to do that. My personal view is that I loathe the things and I think that first, from the point of view of pedagogy, it makes teaching much more difficult.

Secondly, it draws attention to those young people who cannot wear masks, so there is an inclusion issue. In the pecking order of different measures, if there is an expectation that they should continue to be worn because you are going to have to wear them, let’s say, on public transport, if that were the case our members will accept that. It was the



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bubbles that were the most damaging part of all of this and that is why we welcome their disappearance from September.

Q1435 Chair: This next question is to all of you. We know about the damage caused by school closures or while schools were partially open—and I thank all your members, teachers, and support staff for everything they did to try to keep our children educated. We know that there has been a huge rise in mental health disorders from one in nine in 2017 to one in six at the moment, a 400% increase in young people's eating disorders. We know that 2.2 million children have lived in households affected by a toxic trio of family issues, from domestic abuse to parental drug or alcohol dependency. We know that even before Covid 27,000 children had self-identified as gang members.

There is an increasing movement for a longer school day. The Labour shadow Secretary of State has said that an extended school day could be used to teach more life skills. We know that Kevan Collins has suggested 10 hours extra per child per year, but *The Guardian* reported that unions appear to have resisted the idea, saying, "Teaching unions criticise plan to extend school day in England". Do you agree that we should weave more time, save one hour, and that we should do so in a permanent, structured, and consistent way, rather than the odd bolt-on here or there? Who would like to start? Looking at my screen from left to right, Darren?

Darren Northcott: The key question here is what is the most effective intervention? You have identified some of the challenges the pandemic has thrown up and we know that there is a challenge. We have to go with the evidence around what we know works in respect of interventions. I would say that if we are talking about a crude extension of formal taught time—adding a period 6, say, on to the end of the school day—I do not think the international evidence supports that being a particularly effective intervention.

There is perhaps an interesting conversation to have around wider services for schools, extended services, and looking at how schools can play a role in that holistic recovery of children and young people. My starting point would be that the evidence internationally does not stack up. The OECD is very clear that what matters most is what happens in school in the time that you have, rather than—

Q1436 Chair: To be clear, you do not support a longer school day?

Darren Northcott: From our point of view, we would not support an extension to the formal taught time in the school day, no.

Leigh Powell: Many of our staff are reporting that they are absolutely exhausted. Our position is that we do feel that merely extending the school day by half an hour or an hour, and doing absolutely nothing else, is going to give you an example of diminishing returns set into action.



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We asked a few people who are working extra at the moment—support staff and teaching assistants who are having to deliver many, many interventions as part of the catch-up plan. What they said and here is one that we heard, “An extra half an hour has been added to the school day one day a week. Support staff are absorbing this extra time into their contracted hours. This means they are under pressure to complete their normal tasks for that day, preparation for the next day, tidying up and so on, and people are just beginning to realise now that this is not working.” There are lots of things that you need to do to catch up but just sticking an extra hour on the end of the school day is unlikely to work.

Q1437 **Chair:** To be clear, you are opposed to a longer school day?

Leigh Powell: Yes.

Kevin Courtney: To be clear, Robert, the DfE has not approached us at any stage for any discussions about a longer school day. Ministers have not come to the unions; senior civil servants have not come to the unions asking for a discussion about that. However, we have directly engaged with Kevan Collins and are broadly supportive of the suggestions that he has made. We support his request for £15 billion, which the Government should have agreed to instead of cutting back to just one-tenth of that. As you know, his request was slightly less than the US Government or the Netherlands Government have pledged.

Q1438 **Chair:** We will come on to the catch-up later no doubt, but do you support the concept? He was saying an extra half an hour school day. Do you support that, or do you think it should be more or less?

Kevin Courtney: We supported his contention that it is not sensible to have really compressed lunchtimes at schools, although you have to talk to schools about why they have compressed their lunchtimes. He suggested that having longer lunchtimes means that children get more socialisation, more play. We think that is broadly right. We have broadly supported the notion of extended schools with enrichment activities around the school day.

Q1439 **Chair:** That would be longer hours?

Kevin Courtney: That would be longer hours for children. The question is: what are they doing and who is doing it with them?

Q1440 **Chair:** You support the principle of it. It is a separate argument about what they should be doing in that hour.

Kevin Courtney: It is difficult to put it that way—to say that it is only the question of time. It really matters what is done in that time and who is doing it.

Q1441 **Chair:** Yes. I am not arguing that. Absolutely, there has to be a debate of what it would be. I am trying to understand if you genuinely support the principle of a longer school day, which is what Kevan proposed.



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Kevin Courtney: An extended school day does not have to be compulsory for children. We know that 60% of parents in *The Times* survey did not support a longer school day. Another 10%—

Q1442 **Chair:** Can you just say whether or not you support a longer school day? You can have a separate argument about what it could consist of.

Kevin Courtney: I support the notion of an entitlement to enrichment activities, sports, and arts and so on being there.

Q1443 **Chair:** Do you support a longer school day?

Kevin Courtney: I have answered that question.

Q1444 **Chair:** I will leave it to the viewers to judge that. Geoff, you talked about doing something radical when talking about education recovery. When you say doing something radical, apart from saying you want £15 billion from the Government, what does that mean in practice? Do you support a longer school day and what would a radical catch-up plan look like?

Geoff Barton: In the scheme of things, adding half an hour to the end of every school day is not very radical. It is about quality of education rather than quantity, and schools work in different contexts. When I was a deputy head, in some cases kids were travelling 120 miles to school; they could not stay after school, so what we did was to move all the enrichment into a very long lunchtime, an hour and a quarter lunchtime. That was right in that context.

I think what the Government are saying is, "Let's have a look at what the evidence is. Does it seem to be the case that longer school days lead to young people not just doing better in attainment terms, but having the kind of enrichment opportunities, the music, the sports, that we would want for our own children?" We would strongly support that. Let's look at the evidence. Let's make sure that we are funding that properly and make sure that it is based on quality over quantity.

Q1445 **Chair:** If the evidence supports it and there are things that are happening in that longer school day that you support, you will support the principle of a longer school day, is that what you are saying?

Geoff Barton: I would. One particular point, Robert, if you do not mind me making it. If what you do is to say to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, "You have fallen behind so you are going to stay behind after school," they will not stay behind. If this is an entitlement for every child from every background, whether they are getting tutoring, arts, sport, debating—the things that I guess the Chancellor would want for his children and the Prime Minister will have had in his education—that would be ambitious and thus that would be doing something for the nation's young people.

Chair: Briefly, Kevin, because I want to come on to a different subject and I am going to direct the questions to you in a minute.



Kevin Courtney: Geoff's point about needing recovery not catch-up and getting the right psychology with young people about this really matters. But, Robert, you are asking us the question about longer school days and I am not sure whether there is an implication that teachers would just do longer school days, possibly without even more pay. You do need to think about the evidence around recruitment and retention. The OECD's TALIS survey of 2018 shows that teachers in England are working the longest hours, not because they are working longer hours in class but because something is going wrong in our education system; teachers are working far longer hours outside class, with far less autonomy, and with far more scrutiny of them. You have to deal with those issues as well. Teachers would not be—

Q1446 **Chair:** We are going to come on to that later. I accept that is a valid point. I just wanted to get the view about the principle of a longer school day.

Kevin, I have a completely different set of questions to ask you now, and it is just to you. It is on the very difficult area of antisemitism. The IHRA's definition of antisemitism has been endorsed and adopted by the main political parties, the Government, Crown Prosecution Service, College of Policing, and all major Jewish community organisations, including the Campaign Against Antisemitism and the Community Security Trust. There is nothing to stop the NEU executive from adopting the definition.

John Lopez, a former NEU rep said, "I felt I had no choice but to leave the union, which isolated me as a Jewish, pro-Israel teacher. I spent close to two years trying to get the NEU to adopt the IHRA definition so Jewish NEU members can feel safer, as well as writing letters with others to *Educate* magazine which were ignored".

Why does the NEU think it knows better and why do you as yet refuse to adopt the IHRA definition? Why will you not adopt it and use it as a starting point to address issues within your member body?

Kevin Courtney: I would like Mr Lopez to rejoin the union and I have written to several Jewish members recently saying there is definitely a very strong place for them in this union. For people who see Israel as the homeland of a nation, who see it as a refuge of last resort, who see it as a response to the holocaust, there is a place for people with those views in our union.

Q1447 **Chair:** Why not adopt the IHRA?

Kevin Courtney: Mr Lopez has put his motion through his branch at Barnet, which supported that motion. It went through our democratic process, but it was not prioritised for discussion at the last conference.

Q1448 **Chair:** As the leadership why not adopt it, given that so many other organisations have, including the Labour party and many others?

Kevin Courtney: That is an option that is open to us.



Q1449 **Chair:** Why have you not done it?

Kevin Courtney: Because we have not even discussed it.

Q1450 **Chair:** It seems very odd that most other organisations like yours have adopted it—I have pointed out a few of them.

Kevin Courtney: We are very definitely a union that is working very hard against antisemitism. We are currently planning training on antisemitism. We have discussed—

Q1451 **Chair:** I am going to come on to that. We know that there have been general concerns that the NEU stance on the conflict between Israel and Hamas was unbalanced, with some Jewish Free School staffers alleging that the NEU failed to condemn Hamas. We know that over 100 Jewish teachers have left your union, the NEU, over antisemitism—over 100—because of these concerns. Twenty-five teachers have left the NEU from the Jewish Free School. Why do you think that these members have resigned from the union and what do you need to do to convince these teachers otherwise? What have you personally done to address anti-Jewish racism within the union?

Kevin Courtney: I have written to those members who have left, in the terms that I have just spoken to you about, and I have addressed that in those terms with our national executive and with our branch secretaries.

The characterisation of the demonstrations as being around the dispute between Israel and Hamas, I slightly contest. We started getting involved in those demonstrations and I personally spoke at the demonstrations. They were about the evictions of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah. Those evictions of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah were condemned by the British Government and the United Nations. The UN raised the question that they might be—

Q1452 **Chair:** I am going to come on to the demonstration. I am asking you about the fact that 100 Jewish teachers have left the NEU because of antisemitism, and I have received some documentation. Let me come on to that. Basically, the Jewish members of your union feel that the union support is secondary to its campaigns in terms of criticising the state of Israel for one action or another.

Kevin Courtney: That is not true, and that is why I have written in the terms that I have to Jewish members. We did raise this. It is really relevant that the demonstration was about Sheikh Jarrah. In the statements that we have put out, we have said—we said this before the bombing was over—that Hamas and the Israeli Government should both stop the bombings. We said that. When I spoke at the demonstrations, I said that. So that the bombs had stopped—

Q1453 **Chair:** I am going to come on to the demonstration in a minute. Ewa Jasiewicz—I may be pronouncing the name wrongly—who is sadly infamous for defacing the walls of the Warsaw ghetto with the slogan



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“Free Gaza and Palestine”, organised antisemitism training with the NEU this year. Who decided to deliver the content of these sessions? The Campaign Against Antisemitism has noted that the sessions were led by two activists from a fringe organisation called Judas. Why did you choose a controversial fringe group to do this when you could have used many mainstream Jewish organisations from the Board of Deputies, Jewish Leadership Council, and other organisations?

Kevin Courtney: Robert, I really welcome these questions and I would like an opportunity to talk with you in more detail about them. To give you a potted version of this question, we have our Black Members Organising Forum in the north-west. We seek to engage our members in all areas of the country, and we have an organising forum of black members in the north-west. We allocate staff to work with those organising forums to help them. Ewa Jasiewicz was attached to that particular organising forum. They wanted a session of events on racism. They wanted to look at the NEU’s antiracist framework. They wanted to look at Islamophobia, they wanted to look at antisemitism, and they started with quite an intellectual approach—in some cases quite far away from the immediate. They wanted to look at it in the intellectual history of these things. Ewa did a very good job of sourcing the sort of people that that group wanted to—

Q1454 **Chair:** Someone who put graffiti on the walls of the Warsaw ghetto, you think did a very good job? You think that is somebody well suited to teach about organising antisemitism training—someone who defaces the Warsaw ghetto?

Kevin Courtney: She did not teach about it, as you would know.

Q1455 **Chair:** She organised it. You just said she did a good job to organise antisemitism training within the NEU.

Kevin Courtney: She organised the people who taught it. She did not teach it.

Q1456 **Chair:** Did she or did she not organise antisemitism training within the NEU this year?

Kevin Courtney: She sourced the people at the request of the Black Members Organising Forum, but I think—

Q1457 **Chair:** Right, so someone who defaced the Warsaw ghetto, a place that I have been to, to see—

Kevin Courtney: You are raising that, and it is important that you allow me to say something about that. The action that Ewa took at that point—that a member of staff took at that point in 2010—was completely wrong. We did not know about it when we employed her. We did not know about it until 2018. When we did know about it, we met with her immediately at a very senior level in the union, with her union rep.



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We discussed the fact that that action was absolutely wrong; that defacing a holocaust memorial was wrong; that drawing an equivalency between the Israeli Government and the Nazis was wrong. We went through that with her. We were saying those things not because we thought they might cause bad publicity or that they were at variance with the IHRA definition, but because we believed them to be wrong in absolute terms. They were wrong. We discussed that with her.

I will not say more about our internal disciplinary processes. We discussed those with her at that time. She had apologised for them before that time, and she repeated that apology at that moment. I believe in redemption and I think that Ewa does a good job working for our union. She has apologised for those actions, which were wrong.

Q1458 Chair: You talked about the demonstrations earlier. On 22 May you addressed a crowd rife with antisemitic placards saying that Jews are Christ killers and will strike again, that Hamas are freedom fighters, that Israeli Jews are Nazis or committing a holocaust. You failed to condemn them, yet you spoke at that rally.

Further to this, Louise Regan, the NEU's national officer, organised an anti-Israel demonstration in Nottingham on 15 June. A speaker at that rally also spoke in support of Hamas and supported resistance by any means necessary. Do you believe it is appropriate for you to speak at rallies where there are antisemitic chants and placards and support for those who support acts of terrorism, whatever one's view is about the Israeli and Middle East conflict?

Kevin Courtney: I condemn all acts of antisemitism, and I condemn them wherever I see them.

Q1459 Chair: So why speak at such an event? These placards were everywhere, yet you said nothing at that event.

Kevin Courtney: They were not everywhere because I did not see them.

Q1460 Chair: There were all over TV. They were all over the television. I saw them and many other people saw them. Your Jewish members, the 100 who resigned, saw them.

Kevin Courtney: You can see them in TV, yes. I have subsequently seen some of them on TV, but the vast majority of placards on that demonstration were not antisemitic. There were hundreds of members of my union on those demonstrations—young Muslim members of the union, teachers, teaching assistants, support staff, mental health counsellors—who I spoke to on that demonstration. On the demonstration I made a point of saying, "We are all here in our diversity against all forms of racism, against all forms of Islamophobia and against all forms of antisemitism"—

Chair: When did you criticise in that demonstration—



Kevin Courtney: That line from my speech was the most applauded line of my speech and was the most applauded line at the demonstration.

Q1461 **Chair:** In that demonstration, which you went to, which had awful antisemitic tropes on placards, not once did you acknowledge that the schools across the border from Gaza and the Israeli town of Sderot and other places in Israel have closed because of balloon and rocket attacks, and the need for bomb shelters in playgrounds and the trauma those children experience. Would it not have been fairer of you to acknowledge that there has been tragedy on both sides of this awful conflict, rather than speaking at a demonstration and, in essence, making sure that most Jewish members of the NEU feel completely isolated and ignored?

Kevin Courtney: I am proud of speaking at that demonstration, all three of the demonstrations that I spoke at. I am proud of it. The only way to peace is through justice. The evictions at Sheikh Jarrah, the incursions into the mosque, are betrayals of justice and they make peace, a two-state solution, a one-state solution, further away. The UK Government criticised them. The UN criticised them. I was right to be there and, do you know, I have been criticised before. I have been criticised by members of the Conservative party before for being involved in anti-apartheid activities, and I was proud to be involved to be involved in anti-apartheid activities and I am proud to be involved in these activities.

You have attacked Louise Regan and I want to say something in Louise's defence, because she is a fantastic member of my union and a supporter of the Palestinians. After there were antisemitic attacks in Barnet, the day after the first of those large demonstrations, when some people disgracefully drove through Barnet shouting antisemitic slogans, Louise was one of the very first people on Facebook condemning those actions and saying that anti-Semites have no place in the solidarity of—

Q1462 **Chair:** Yet you spoke in this rally where people were supporting Hamas, at the same rally, you spoke at a rally.

Just to conclude this line of questioning before I pass to my colleague Ian Mearns, or Tom Hunt if he is online, you have not yet adopted the IHRA, which is very sad, given that many other similar organisations, thank God, have adopted that. You have had 100 Jewish members leave who feel that the NEU is a hostile environment. You have spoken at very controversial demonstrations where anti-Jewish placards were put up saying the Jews are Christ killers. Do you really feel that the NEU is safe for Jewish people? Because I cannot see it from where I am sitting here. It seems to me—as David Baddiel wrote in his recent book—that, as far as the NEU is concerned, Jews do not count.

Kevin Courtney: I do not think David Baddiel did mention the NEU—

Q1463 **Chair:** No, I am using the title of his book to sum up the way Jewish people feel; about why 100 people have left your union and the way they feel about it.



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Kevin Courtney: I am just correcting you that he did not say that in his book, and it is absolutely—

Chair: I did not say he said that. I was using the words—

Kevin Courtney: You made it sound like he did.

Q1464 **Chair:** I was using the words to describe. He says Jews do not count. In terms of your union there is clearly a hostile environment to Jews. That is why 100 Jewish members have left.

Kevin Courtney: Jewish people absolutely count in our union, and we want those 100 people to rejoin. There are many more Jewish people who have not left our union because they see that we are a union committed to opposing all forms of racism, including Islamophobia—

Q1465 **Chair:** Except when it comes to antisemitism.

Kevin Courtney: —including antisemitism.

Chair: Except when it comes to antisemitism. Then you turn a blind eye. That is why you do not adopt the IHRA.

Kevin Courtney: It is absolutely untrue. It is absolutely untrue. That is a disgraceful slur on me and on my union.

Q1466 **Chair:** All the evidence I have presented to you; it is pretty clear.

Kevin Courtney: We are supporting Jewish members at the moment who have been the subject of antisemitic attacks.

Q1467 **Chair:** Not from all the accounts that I have seen.

Kevin Courtney: It is a disgraceful slur that you should be ashamed of.

Chair: I think I have presented some pretty serious evidence to show that you have let Jewish members down in your organisation. I will pass to Ian Mearns now. Thank you.

Q1468 **Ian Mearns:** I'm afraid to say, Rob, that as members of the Committee we did not have any pre-knowledge that you were going to do what you have just done, and I personally think it is regrettable.

Can I ask the panel what your view is of vaccinations for school staff and children, particularly in the light of the Government's decision to lift Covid-19 restrictions from 19 July? Have you any thoughts on that? I have a particular concern, certainly in my neck of the woods in the north-east of England, in local authorities around the Tyne and Wear area and in Durham and in Northumberland. The numbers of people testing positive, particularly the young, are very, very high now—higher than they were even at the peak in the winter. When a virus of this nature is letting rip through particular age groups like that, I have a significant concern that variants might develop in that context. What is your view on vaccinations for school staff and children, particularly in the light of the Government's decision to lift the Covid-19 restrictions from next Monday?



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Kevin Courtney: We completely support the vaccination programme and praise the scientists and the NHS involved. We have been doing everything that we can to encourage education staff to get vaccinated. Whenever an age group came up for vaccination, we were doing a cut of our membership, emailing all of those people, encouraging them to get vaccinated.

We were pleased to see that, by the end of May, in the sample of schools in the ONS Schools Infection Survey, 87% of education staff had been vaccinated, when at that time in the general population it was 75%. So despite being younger, education staff had taken themselves forward for vaccination.

We have been pleased to support some materials that Ed Stubbs—an NEU member working in east London—has produced on vaccine hesitancy. We have been promoting those with the Stephen Hawking Foundation and they have been downloaded thousands of times in this country and in schools around the world. Clearly, we want teachers and support staff to be vaccinated. We want them to be double vaccinated three weeks before the autumn term if that can possibly happen.

The question of vaccination of school students is the question that JCVI must turn its attention to. We are not scientists able to make the assessment, but from the studies in America we do know that the Americans, who have high standards on this like we have, consider these vaccinations to be very safe. We know that if we are going to approach herd immunity through vaccination, we will probably need to vaccinate school students. Given what we understand at the moment from SAGE yesterday, we think that the current peak is going to be reached at the end of August, just as we are going back to school in September. I hope that the JCVI comes forward with decisions soon.

There is lots more to say. You have asked about vaccination, so I will stop, but there is lots more to say about mitigations that we may need in September. It is all very well hoping for the best, but we have to plan for something that is not the best as well.

Ian Mearns: Yes. Does anyone else want to come in?

Geoff Barton: I would echo what Geoff has said there and once again echo what I said earlier. We do not take a view on things that we do not know enough about, the medical issue, but it is worth reminding ourselves—and parents and staff will be conscious of this—that if you work in a college or a school you are surrounded by large groups of young people. Those young people have not been vaccinated.

It seems to me that, if vaccination is the way out of all of this, we need JCVI to be saying yes or no to young people having the same protection that people over the age of 21 will have by September. Therefore, in principle, it would seem to me one way of building the reassurance that



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all of us are going to need after the spike in all of this at the end of August, as Kevin says.

Ian Mearns: Thanks. Leigh, before I bring you in, I should declare my interest, having been a member of NALGO and then UNISON for 47 years now, I'm afraid to say—I just totted it up. Leigh, over to you, please.

Leigh Powell: Along with the other unions, we have completely supported the decisions of the JCVI throughout and we will continue to completely support the decisions made by the JCVI. We hope that it will make an announcement very soon on vaccinations for those over 12 so that schools can reopen safely. We need a priority on going forward cautiously and making sure that schools never have to close for this reason again. To do that we need a range of mitigations in place; vaccinations are just one and they are an important one, but they are certainly not the only one. I hope we are going to be discussing some of the others soon.

Darren Northcott: I would echo colleagues' comments there. We are waiting for the JCVI to rule on the benefits or otherwise of vaccinating children. There is obviously a kind of intuitively correct and attractive case about doing that, but it is important that we follow and take note of what the JCVI has said. I would also echo the comments that vaccinations are but one part of a mitigation strategy. It is important that we do not lose sight of those other mitigations that are still necessary and may be necessary in future to make sure that schools can operate as closely as possible.

Ian Mearns: Thank you very much. Johnathan wanted to come in on vaccinations, Chair.

Q1469 **Jonathan Gullis:** Thank you very much for the opportunity, Chair. Kevin, the NEU was pushing for teachers to be vaccinated, against the JCVI advice when they wanted to focus on categories 1 to 9. Does the NEU accept that it was wrong?

Kevin Courtney: All the unions were seeking priority vaccination for education staff. As I said earlier, we have supported the vaccination effort in the way that I described and that is important. The Police Federation was supporting priority vaccination for the police at the same time. The JCVI had a difficult decision. After its decision, we met with one of the members of JCVI, Adam Finn from Bristol, who went through with us how there is a real danger of delaying the total vaccination if you break into occupational groups. I wrote a report of that meeting with Adam Finn, which we put on Facebook to explain why the JCVI had made that decision.

Jonathan Gullis: I will take that as yes. Thank you, Chair.

Q1470 **Ian Mearns:** Can I move on to the assessment of how the process for awarding grades this year has been managed by the Department and how this has affected workload? Do you have any concerns about the rest



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of the process for awarding grades this year, such as managing appeals? There is a significant gap in clarity as far as many parts of the profession are concerned.

Kevin Courtney: I think the way the Government, the DfE, have mishandled this has created really huge levels of workload for staff. There is an unacceptable lack of planning for a plan B. We engaged with the DfE, along with other organisations, on this call. We wrote to them in October saying, "Yes, if exams can happen, that is a good route, but what if they can't happen? What are the fallback positions in that event?"

We then tried to engage with civil servants, who told us that they were not allowed to discuss eventualities other than exams. That all meant that until we got to January there was no appreciable planning done. There has now been an enormous workload for teachers in secondary schools—on teacher-assessed grades, on centre-assessed grades—both on the teachers themselves and on their heads of department looking for any sort of moderation, and on the school leaders. All that workload, the vast majority of that workload, lies at the hands of the Department for not planning for an alternative. There are still huge workload implications to come.

I was talking to a secondary head only last week, who only last week had received an email from one of the exam boards asking: would the head teacher be available for every day of the summer holiday so that they can talk to them about the appeals process, and if they are not going to be available every day, can they give them the telephone number of another member of senior staff who will be available for every day of the summer holidays? This is a really disrespectful way for the Department to treat the people who have done so much during the pandemic to get us through us it, so we have all of those concerns.

We are concerned as well because we think that there will be some increase in grades. We are not certain about that, but we think that will be the right thing, frankly. We see what Simon Lebus, the interim chair of Ofqual, wrote about this, talking about, "Imagine I am a fairly self-disciplined teacher determined to act with integrity in grading my students. In 2021 I have a class of 30 year-11 GCSE candidates. Five of them have produced work on more than one occasion under fairly controlled circumstances, which leads me to think they are capable of getting a 9. In an exam they would not all get a 9."

Chair: Sum up, please, Kevin.

Kevin Courtney: Our worry is that politicians might then criticise teachers for an increase in grades, which would be completely inappropriate if that happens.

Q1471 **Ian Mearns:** Geoff, I am particularly interested from your perspective because I had a meeting with two chief executives of two separate academy trusts last week. What they were saying is that they were in



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preparation for what is needing to be done, saying to their heads, "You might not get a break this summer."

Geoff Barton: Yes, the workload has been eye-watering and we are not through it yet. What we want in the summer is young people to feel they got a grade that they have earned. We do not want them to feel victims of an algorithm and all the rest of the stuff, so we are going to keep our narrative on results, stay as positive as we can, because I do not want to rain on those young people's parade.

However, there are risks for teachers here, because you can imagine that calling something a teacher-assessed grade can make you think, if you have a teacher who does not like you or has not been teaching a long time, that this is basically a teacher sticking their finger in the air. The process behind the scenes has been extraordinarily robust within schools. They have done everything they can in terms of quality assurance.

We are now into the phase of quality assurance from the exam boards. Those exam boards have to accept that people in schools will need a break from this. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Secretary of State has moved the results to a week earlier. People who had booked a holiday because we never do results in the week beginning on 9 August, now suddenly find on the Tuesday for A-levels, on the Thursday for GCSEs, we are going to have to have subject staff available ready for the appeals process. I think we will see a huge number of appeals beyond the priority appeals. We are already seeing examples of some parents exerting pressure on some people, saying, "My daughter needs certain grades to get to university. If they don't get them, I've got a lawyer lined up." That is not a caricature. We have that and we are giving legal advice to our members.

The other thing is that, until yesterday, to a GCSE or A-level student who says, "Hey, Miss, how will my exams be assessed next year?" we have not said anything. Robert talks about young people's mental health. There was never a plan B for all of this and there should have been. Even now, the Department and Ofqual are going to do a consultation on what might happen next. Frankly, I think we owe it to young people to go into the summer holiday with their teachers knowing exactly what they are going to have to teach them and how they will be assessed in the exams next year. It is really not good enough.

So, yes, the workload is considerable. Let's hope that at some point we learn from this, with the huge industry of examinations that we have, with the average GCSE children sitting 30 separate papers for a qualification designed in a different era. That we can learn from that and have more moderated kinds of assessment that allow young people to focus on learning instead of having to jump through qualification hoops.

Q1472 **David Simmonds:** I am conscious that teaching unions in the UK do invest a lot of time working with colleagues in other countries. I am interested to hear what learning there has been from how the pandemic



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has affected teachers in other countries and what your view is. I am not talking about the difficult-to-measure, relative levels of Government spending on it, but the pedagogical challenges in particular.

We heard evidence at a recent session that internationally it seems that academic attainment is nowhere near as much affected as people's social, educational, and learning skills. What internationally are you doing with colleagues to look at how we can apply that experience to ensure that our catch-up in the UK is as good as it possibly can be?

Geoff Barton: A couple of points in response to that. First, when people talk about catch-up and recovery and so on, what they sometimes do is think, "We have a national curriculum. Therefore, we can quantify what learning is. Kids have missed out on so many weeks. Therefore, they have missed out on a certain amount of learning." The reality, and we learned this from Tim Oates of Cambridge Assessment, who has been looking at New Zealand, is that within your classroom—not from one class to another—you will have children who will be at very different stages.

What we see from the best teachers—both in this country and New Zealand, for example—is the ability to assess what a young person has missed out on, and which bits really matter. For example, in my subject, English, you need to know some things more than you need to know others. It will be the same in history. What are the keystones of knowledge? What great teachers will do is identify those and give more attention to them, but they are having to do that in a differentiated way because you could be sitting next to somebody who was not in a household with books, let alone laptops and conversations with adults, and you will be at a disadvantage.

What that New Zealand study shows us is that ultimately one-to-one and small-group support for those youngsters, whether it is being done within the lesson, at lunchtime or after school, is the critical factor. That is why a national tutoring programme is a good idea. It is just a pity that it is so bureaucratic and byzantine in its complexity, but the principle of it, taking us back to enrichment after school, means that the teacher identifies it and helps those young people then to get back in.

One quick passing comment, Robert.

Chair: In a nutshell, please.

Geoff Barton: A very quick passing point. The other thing is it is not just about learning and knowledge; it is the routines, the rhythms of school and college life. If you look at the number of young people who are missing from school at the moment, not because of bubbles but they are just missing from school, they are missing out on those important rhythms and routines that feed into you being a successful student.

Chair: Darren or Leigh, do you want to comment on David's question?



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Darren Northcott: It is a very important question. We are members of Education International, as is the National Education Union. We worked through Education International with the OECD to produce a very helpful report on the impact of the pandemic but also what should be emphasised in recovery. David's point is absolutely right. One of the commonalities and experience across industrialised countries is that that focus on the social, cultural, mental health and wellbeing dimensions of children's development and their progress in schools is absolutely fundamental, but that does seem to be a common theme. That is why we will want to emphasise that in educational recovery strategies going forward.

Leigh Powell: My colleagues mentioned there that one-to-one and small-group support is so important in education catch-up. That role is generally undertaken by teaching assistants. When we recently surveyed our teaching assistants, we had 21% tell us that their schools had announced job cuts since March. Of those schools, about 84% were making cuts to support staff roles. We have had year after year after year of teaching assistants being cut and now you are really going to need them, so you are going to need to stop doing that.

Kevin Courtney: Like Darren said, we engage with Education International. We do things in solidarity with the teachers in India—who were unvaccinated and died in quite large numbers—being used on election. We talk about the pedagogy. One of the things that comes up in our country is pretty odd in terms of the amount of formal testing that happens in schools.

There is a real question about whether, with year 6 students, we should spend time trying to teach them how to answer questions about fronted adverbials, when nobody really thinks that that is part of getting to be a good writer and everybody acknowledges that the reason we teach it is because it is easy to examine—it is for SATs, it is for league tables—and other countries do not do that. That is a further restriction on our ability to get recovery right, as well as the high class sizes we have—primary classes at a 20-year high, secondary classes at a 40-year high, much higher than our European neighbours. That is at least part of the reason why our schools have been closed for longer than those in European countries. It is much harder to do social distancing in those circumstances and it is much harder to deal with mental health questions in large classes.

Chair: David Simmonds, have you any comeback or not?

David Simmonds: The question is: can you share with us any international data on that? The examples given anecdotally, that there is a perception around class sizes—certainly the evidence I have seen in international work is that it is broadly consistent. In respect of teachers' pay, the UK is not one of the highest-paying countries in the world, but it is quite a high-paying country in terms of teachers' salaries. It would be useful if you could share some of the data around some of these



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comparisons, so that we can then take an objective view in order to inform our thinking about the UK's response.

Chair: Perhaps you could send us the data. I would like to bring in David Johnston, please. If any of you have the data, you can send it in.

Q1473 **David Johnston:** I do not mind who answers this question. You will know it is floating around, the idea that we should use online a lot more, in everything from whether we get the best teachers' lessons online so that all schools can see those, through to perhaps planning. I am thinking about the workload comment that you were making. I am personally a bit sceptical about having lessons online because I do not think it is any substitute for being in the classroom, particularly for disadvantaged students. What do you think about that—the various ideas about using online to spread the best practice more than we do?

Darren Northcott: I am happy to start responding to that. We have been very clear that the best place for children is in school. That is where they get the best educational opportunities, but we have seen some very innovative and quite creative use of technology during the course of the pandemic. There is an important conversation to be had, given the fact that we have this technology now and young people have access to it. There were problems, of course, and there still are problems in terms of the access to the technology. That is important in terms of addressing differential educational outcomes.

It is very important that we see technology as a complement to the work that goes on in schools and colleges, not as a substitute for it. So we start from that principle and think sensibly about how technology can be used. Your point, David, about the workload implications of remote education is clear. One of the top concerns that our members raised during the course of this academic year was the workload and the burdens associated with getting online education up and running. Our members did it and staff in schools did it because they needed to make sure that children had that opportunity, but the workload associated with remote education is an important point that has to be thought through. This is a complement to classroom teaching; it is not a substitute for it.

Kevin Courtney: I absolutely agree with that. Our members worked well to get learning online and they would like to see it as an accompaniment. For that, we need all children to have broadband and equipment at home. There is a poverty question to address there but it could then be a good supplement.

Specifically, David, I have been involved with one school looking at a restructure because the MAT is taking money away from it. There was a proposal there that a teacher would be teaching online on one site in one school and children receiving information online in another school. That has been incredibly unpopular with the parents at that school. We think face-to-face is much better.



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One place where I think online could be good for the future is parents' evenings, and at least some of them continuing to be online. We are getting quite good take-up of parents' evenings online and it is worth looking at whether that could continue. When you are in a parents' evening, you have one to one anyway—that is the way you do it, so doing one to one through a Zoom or Teams connection connection is something to look at trying to hang on to.

Q1474 David Johnston: Leigh, could you comment specifically on the lesson-planning aspects, which I do not think anyone has commented on yet? If there is scepticism about lessons going to other sites, what about lesson planning, to take that away from being online, with whatever else you were going to say?

Leigh Powell: You would be best directing the lesson planning question to my teaching colleagues, who would be best placed to answer that.

From a support staff perspective, I want to alert you to some research that we are doing at UNISON on this very issue. There is a danger that everyone will say, "We managed to save education by moving everyone online, so let's just continue that in future." We have not analysed exactly what the benefits were and exactly what the drawbacks were.

As quite a few of you have already mentioned, there is an emerging mental health crisis in education. One of my particular worries—and the reason we are undertaking this research—is that in colleges, which are so poorly funded compared to the rest of the education sector, there is going to be a huge temptation to move courses online. We know that colleges serve a very disadvantaged population, far more so than the rest of the education sector does. Colleges serve far more special needs students. While there are many benefits that could be gained, we are looking now into what could happen to young people socially if too much is moved online. So please keep in touch with us and we will tell you what the result of that research is.

Geoff Barton: Two points, David, in response to the question. We ought to learn about what has happened with the online stuff. The National Academy has done good work and BBC Bitesize has done good work. Individual schools and trusts of all different shades have done some really good work. As Kevin says—and we are all saying—is that what this has shown us is that schools and colleges are cradles of humanity. There is something about having something explained to you by somebody who knows their stuff and can answer your questions that you do not get in the unnuanced world online.

The challenge that you give us is more interesting, if we talk about what technology could do. How can technology do some of the heavy lifting? Technology could give a student better feedback perhaps than I do. We see different programmes that do that. It can allow you to be immersed in learning in a way that I, standing at the front, cannot. At the same time, what that could do is change the workload of teachers, so that



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teachers start to feel that they are part of a 21st-century profession where technology does the heavy lifting, the boring stuff that robots can do, allowing them to demonstrate the humanity of explaining things in small groups and so on.

For me, that would be one of those bits of radicalism that Robert referenced earlier on, where we use this as an opportunity to ask: how could technology transform education in the way that it is transforming medicine, for example? Would that not end the teacher recruitment crisis in some ways, because you are not taking home piles of books all the time and the assessment is being in part done by AI? There is a great opportunity there.

Q1475 Jonathan Gullis: I suspect we have asked most of these questions about exams for next year, due to the fact of lost learning and what people think assessments should be. I am a bit concerned that Kevin and Geoff seem to think that we should be totally scrapping SATs and scrapping exams in general. Hopefully, I misunderstood that so I will allow them both to come and correct the record there if I have misunderstood it. What I would like to know is: when is the latest that your members need to have details on next year's assessments?

Geoff Barton: For the record, I did not use the words "scrapping exams" and nor did Kevin, so we are not talking about that. I do think that the burden at GCSE was designed by a very radical Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker; he wanted to strangle GCSE. I would keep some element of formal assessment for the very reason I said before: that external assessment allows you to demonstrate that you have earned something against the impersonal examiner. I am just not convinced that we need the juggernaut of exams that we have at the moment. There is a nice reform agenda if we have a sense of ambition from the Department for Education at some point.

Specifically to the question, the debate is this: we now know that there is going to have to be some modification to the exams next year. The way you modify exams next year is you give some prior information to young people—you give them datasheets, or you give them anthologies and all of that stuff so that there is less rote learning, and you immerse them in what they know they are going to be assessed on. You can modify the papers by saying certain topics will be in the papers and certain topics should be out of the papers.

When should you tell teachers what should be in exams next year and when should you tell young people? There are two arguments. One is you tell them next February, because then you have covered the whole syllabus as best you can and in the revision period you build up to what the assessment looks like. That seems to be the direction of travel.

While they understand the broad and balanced principle about that, many of my members say, "Hang on a minute. We've had young people who have missed out on half of their learning during GCSE. It's unrealistic to



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expect we can superficially cover the whole syllabus. Tell us what we need to teach them from September onwards, so that we give them the best chance of feeling that they have earned the grade.” What we got yesterday from the Government is a consultation on the approach.

I think what we will see is a split view in terms of which of those is best. Do you have the board and balanced curriculum narrowed down at the end or do you say young people need to have clarity of how they will be assessed? That is the debate going on at the moment.

Kevin Courtney: I will probably end up disappointing Jonathan a little, but I do feel there is a need for some new thinking around assessment. You see that in the four commissions that have been set up around GCSEs. There is *The Times* commissioners. There is the Rethinking Education that Lord Kenneth Baker is running. There is the Pearson Commission and there is the Independent Assessment Commission that my own union has set up and is funding, but it is completely independent of us. There are things to think through about exams at 16, but I certainly did not say that there should not be exams next year.

On the other hand, there is the question of SATs. When you are thinking about the need to balance recovery, we want children to think this is recovery, not catch-up, and not that they have loads of things they have missed. It is just true that the curriculum for the SATs in year 6 is not designed on the basis of what you need to do to be a successful learner elsewhere. It is designed on the basis of what is easy to examine in order to have league tables. We should not do SATs next year. I do not think they should happen at all. There are better ways of assessing children and assessing schools. That goes back to the TALIS report, and the way teachers here feel so differently treated to those in other countries. We certainly should not be doing them next year.

On the question about next summer specifically, summer 2022, we have to think about the fact that the children we are talking about were in year 9 in March 2020. They had huge disruption in year 9, they have had a very disrupted year 10, and the question of the exams for them really matters. We do not want them being put through a mental health crisis; we want to help them.

The things that Geoff talked about—the notion of choice of topics, the notion of some advanced notion of topics—we think they are important, especially when you bear in mind that there has been a huge differential amount of education lost, depending on your level of poverty, effectively. Schools with more free school meals children in them have had far more school closures during the autumn term than schools with fewer. That is because if you are working class you find it far harder to work at home, so you have been going out. Your housing is likely to be more densely packed, so there have been more cases and there has been more disruption. There is a very large differential level of disruption, so we have to think about something that allows a smaller amount of time—



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Chair: I have to bring in other witnesses as well. Thanks, Kevin. Darren and Leigh.

Darren Northcott: On examinations, to pick up Jonathan's point about the role of examinations. We debated this at our last annual conference. The conference had a chance to decide whether they wanted examinations in the qualification system or not. The decision was fairly convincing. Members did think examinations had a role in the future. The debate is going to be whether we have the balance right between examinations and other forms of assessment.

In the short term, it is going to be very important to make sure that we communicate what will happen next year to schools so that they can plan. If you had a representative from the DfE here they would admit that the timing of this consultation is not particularly helpful, but we are where we are. We need to make sure that we get the best mitigations possible in place so that the learning disruption that young people have experienced over the course of the pandemic is reflected as effectively as possible in the qualification system, recognising that there are no easy, straightforward solutions to this. All the solutions are suboptimal, but we have to work through the consultation to get the best resolution that we can to this.

Leigh Powell: My teaching colleagues have summed up the situation very well and I have nothing further to add.

Q1476 **Jonathan Gullis:** Kevin, first of all, I am sure I disappoint you as much as you disappoint me, so don't worry about that. With regards to Geoff, my apologies. Kevin seems to be the outlier here, not wanting to totally reform exams sat at year 6 and potentially scrap them for GCSE from the sounds of things. I look forward to seeing that idea coming forward, but heigh-ho.

On the idea of choosing topics though, I get worried about this, Geoff. How is that being done? I have no issue with advance notice of topics and being taught to that advance notice. That is one area, but I am just checking: are you talking about choosing on the exam paper? That makes it a nightmare to write exam papers. I want to understand what you mean by choosing.

Geoff Barton: No, I do not mean that. Last year we endlessly debated what optionality looks like and I am not convinced by what Ofqual and the awarding organisations were telling me, which was that the more complicated you make exam papers, the more you disadvantage disadvantaged children who find it harder to navigate their way through.

We are saying that if it is the case that you will be assessed on the Stuarts but not on the Tudors, it only feels reasonable that in the run-up to the exams you know what you will be assessed on and what will not appear in the paper. Young people need to be prepared for that modification of papers. As I say, the question is when they need to know



that. Lots of people would say sooner rather than later; some people would say later rather than sooner.

Q1477 **Jonathan Gullis:** Kevin, I will come to you quickly. I also want to know when you respond as well when we will end the modifications to exam papers. When do we start a normal exam series? Is that the incoming year 7 this year or do we do 2022 as one more outlier and then go straight into the normal practice with the way things are working?

Geoff Barton: It is difficult to say until we see what the autumn term looks like and the disruption. There is a craving from many of us to default to the old norm, notwithstanding that there are questions around GCSE in the long term at the moment. Nevertheless, we need to start thinking that we owe it to young people to give them that kind of normality. The big issue of course, which I am sure you will be talking about, is what we do about grade inflation, and we start pulling all of that back to 2019 levels.

Q1478 **Chair:** I was going to ask you how you unbake the hard rock of grade inflation, which is now in essence endemic in the grading system.

Geoff Barton: Yes, we will have to do that because, when people talk about grade inflation, they talk about it as some kind of arcane intellectual thing. The reality is that if you get a grade 7 in GCSE physics, you will go on to an A-level physics course rather than what you might have been intending to do, and you will perhaps struggle and be out of your depth. This has consequences for young people feeling like failures on their courses. We do have to recalibrate the system. The discussion around that is that there will need to be a phased approach, probably starting with next year's exams, so that we are starting then to try to move back to 2019. Quite how you do that without young people thinking they have been significantly victims in all of that—because suddenly all grade inflation has been wiped out and they are getting a grade nothing like their sister's this year or last year—will need careful thinking. Quite rightly, the Government are saying, "Let us not have that debate quite at the moment. Let us get the arrangements for next year's exams sorted first and then let us start thinking through how to start recalibrating using comparable outcomes", as it is called.

Jonathan Gullis: I do not know if Kevin wants to come in.

Kevin Courtney: I want to come in on next year and then go on to your other question, Jonathan, about future years. Regarding next year, Geoff talked about the debate, and we in the National Education Union are on the side of the debate that children and teachers need as much notice as possible. We are in favour of children and teachers having that notice from September and not waiting until Easter or February, so that people can have a sense of security around what they will be examined on and prepare for it well.

In terms of going forward, we should all be hoping that the spread of the vaccination will mean that we get through this. We do not know how well



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that will work but, if we get through it, we can start to think about unwinding some of this stuff from 2023.

Jonathan, I am not the outlier on the question of exams at 16. I have not said I am against them. On our commission that we set up, we have the CBI, and we have Kenneth Baker's Edge foundation. On some things there is wide agreement outside the DfE. For example, the fact that we use norm-referenced exams, which mean that every year 30% of children are given what is considered failing grades in maths and English, is not the right way to look at these things. We should at least have criteria-referenced exams, so you mark where you have gone instead of the norm-referenced system we have at the moment.

We are not the outlier in this. People know there are things amiss with our exam system at 16. Nobody wants to rush into things, but change is important.

Q1479 **Jonathan Gullis:** I can assure you, Kevin, I am not inside the DfE. I am not a Minister. I just worked in teaching for eight and a half years and as a head of year. I am sure you and I will continue to disagree on this and many other things. Best of luck at trying to convince me.

Kevin Courtney: I will give it a go.

Q1480 **Ian Mearns:** This has been touched on, but it is something we do need to get a proper handle on. I would be interested to know the panel's assessment to date of the sufficiency of the Government's catch-up recovery plans in terms of the measures introduced and the level of funding. A couple of you have mentioned having discussions with Kevan Collins. Of course, Kevan is not in that role anymore. What is your assessment of where we are with this whole agenda?

Geoff Barton: First of all, we should recognise that what the £1.5 billion—10% of what Kevan Collins was recommending—was being proposed for was significant nevertheless, with £500 million on teacher training and teacher development. That ought to have been a good news story, frankly, because, going back to my earlier point, we know that if this is about the quality of teaching, putting more time into teacher development is important.

We have not seen Kevan's report. It was leaked to *The Times*. We do know from what he was talking about that there was going to be a huge focus on early years, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds being given more time in their nursery and early years providers because that would build the foundations for the future. It was a way of reducing the costs later on.

He was also doing something that Robert will agree with, I am sure. He was recognising that if you are an FE student in this country, in England, you get something like 17 hours of teaching a week, compared with 24 hours in Germany, if I remember correctly. He was proposing that those kids who often do not get the attention, who are not jumping up and



down on the front of *The Telegraph* because they are not doing A-levels, will get higher-quality teaching as well. Additionally, he was talking about that entitlement to enrichment and tutoring, blended in the way that I was saying before, so that every young person, irrespective of background, is getting those things that we know are not soft and fluffy but build your character and your resilience and give you a love of the arts that you might not have had before.

That was an incredible mission and that was turned down by the Treasury. From my point of view, shame on them because that is the kind of education they would want for their own children.

Q1481 **Ian Mearns:** Does everyone agree with Geoff? Is that a good assessment? I am particularly interested in your views. If the plans and resources available are insufficient by the comparison with what Kevan Collins was proposing, which children will suffer most because of that?

Darren Northcott: Ian, the children who will suffer most are the most disadvantaged and those who face the most barriers to progress and achievement.

One important point, though, needs emphasising here. We had Kevan Collins working on a strategy, which has ended up where it has ended up, and we have a bit of a vacuum now around what education recovery will look like. The Government have made their announcements—Geoff referenced those. The Government are dropping hints that this is not the end of it and that there is more to come. There is, clearly, a comprehensive spending review later in the year that will need evidence submitted to it in terms of additional funding and resources.

There is still work to be done to develop a more comprehensive education recovery strategy that perhaps resembles some of those in the United States and in the Netherlands. A lot of attention and thinking has gone on there. The vacuum here needs to be filled because, at the moment, we do not have anything like an education recovery strategy, even though it is common ground that we need to develop one.

Q1482 **Chair:** We know that in autumn 2020 around 33,000 additional pupils were severely absent, missing 50% or more of their possible sessions. The CSJ found that now around 93,500 pupils fall into that category, a rise of over 54% year on year. In primary schools the spike was even more acute. The rate of severe absence in this area more than doubled. I describe these as the ghost children, who have not returned to school even when they have fully been opened.

How do we successfully support these children back into school? Realistically, what can the schools do in this context? How much engagement needs to be done by individuals or organisations? Who should they be?



Darren Northcott: That is an important point. When we talk about education recovery, securing good attendance is often overlooked. It is important that you have raised it.

Statutorily, the responsibility for attendance rests with local authorities. Regardless of the school that children attend, local authorities have that responsibility. As part of the recovery strategy, to get attendance up and to reach out to some of these families and some of these children not being back at school to the extent we would find acceptable, investment in local authority attendance services will be critical. Those have been decimated over the past decade. Investment in supporting children to access their entitlement to education must be a core component of that education recovery strategy.

Kevin Courtney: Kevan Collins suggests that the need to get children back into school and the need to have money is now, not at the comprehensive spending review. We need it in schools now because the gaps in terms of attendance are being compounded right now with the number of children who are missing school. The PHE is reporting a doubling of school outbreaks at the moment. We know that they are more in the north-east and the north-west, which goes back to Ian's question about which children will be most affected.

If we are talking about getting children back into school, we have to think about these things holistically. Kevan Collins's report did do that, but you have to look at the mental health questions. You have to look at whether the experience of a child doing GCSEs means they are on track to get failing grades. Because of norm referencing, nothing can sensibly be done about it. It is hard to engage children who think that they are guaranteed failure at the end of their school career.

We have to work on all of those components. Some of those are short term, some of them longer term, but we need to address all of them.

Q1483 **Chair:** To be clear, on the issue of the catch-up, however much money it is, it will work for those children who are in school. My question is about what will happen to the children who are not in school and who have not even returned and what remedial action needs to be taken.

Kevin Courtney: There needs to be outreach. There needs to be mental health support in schools. We need systems of tracking who those children are and then find ways to encourage them back. That does require staffing. We are aware of schools, as Leigh was talking about earlier on, that are doing restructures, and some schools are cutting the attendance officers—the people who make the phone calls to find out where children are. Investment is required, as well as thinking through the curriculum offer and the mental health offer to those children.

Leigh Powell: I agree that it needs huge investment in a vast array of services—in local authority children's services for those children who may have disappeared from the system, in education welfare officers, and in



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the in-school administrators who are chasing up those children. All those services need to be invested in.

At the same time, we do not want to force children back into unsafe schools. Nobody wants that, so we do also need to concentrate on making sure that schools are safe in September. We need to invest in making sure that they are. No one today has mentioned ventilation systems in schools being safe when the children go back. No one has mentioned so many of those mitigations that do need to be in place. We cannot force children back into unsafe schools or staff into unsafe workplaces.

Geoff Barton: We should all be hugely concerned about these missing young people. We need forensically to know who they are and the reasons.

As I know from colleagues in the north-west, some of them are kids who have not returned from going to visit family ages ago—they are still out of the country. Secondly, some young people feel vulnerable or feel scared and their parents are supporting them in not coming to school. Thirdly, Sean Coughlan at the BBC was right in his analysis of next week, the implication is that some parents have basically given up and are saying, "Here is an opportunity for an early holiday". Have a look at the beaches of Cornwall. They will not all be children from Leicestershire schools that closed down last week.

That is why Leigh's point is right. We now need an extraordinary campaign to demonstrate that when schools and colleges open again in September, it will be as close to business as usual as we can make it. It will be exciting for children to be back in school. There will be all of those resources to make sure hesitant young people are encouraged to be there. We need schools and colleges to focus on what they do best: education. We do not want endless ongoing mass testing because we need to focus on those young people and the enrichment that will make them think, "At last I am back in the normal environment of school."

Q1484 **Chair:** There do need to be significant engagement programmes with families. I suspect not all of them are on Cornwall holidays. Kids are probably suffering safeguarding issues and whatever it may be.

Geoff Barton: Absolutely. That is why knowing who those kids are and who those families are and who those communities are is a job of work to make sure—

Q1485 **Chair:** Who should be doing that, the schools, the local authorities, or everyone?

Geoff Barton: A good thing throughout all of this is that with all categorisations of schools—whether they are academies, academy trusts or independent schools—we have seen an extraordinary sense of working together and local authorities working with schools of all types to identify the young people missing in action and to deploy the right person who



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knows the families best to encourage them back in. My guess is that that work is going on at the moment ready for September.

Chair: Thank you. Jonathan, did you want to come back in on longer school days? We did some of that at the beginning, but I do not know if you want to come back on it.

Q1486 **Jonathan Gullis:** As you know, Chair, I am a huge advocate for a longer school day and a shorter summer break. I had advocated from six weeks to four weeks, but I am happy to go from six to five and then put maybe that week in the October half-term because the autumn term is a very long term indeed both for staff and for students. I apologise if I missed what Geoff, Leigh, Kevin, and Darren have all said.

By the way, Chair, I forgot to say that I should declare my interest as a member of the NASUWT. I should make sure that I get that on the record; otherwise, I will end up in trouble at some stage. It is the endorsement the NASUWT probably did not want. Apologies for that.

At the end of the day, we have the idea about what we need to do to put a longer school day and shorter holidays in place. I am a huge advocate, by the way, before people come back, of the idea of taking 10% of the pupil premium, ringfencing it to be spent only on pupil premium, and then working with the Challenger Trust that I relentlessly talk about, which does fantastic work in Gateshead up in Ian's patch. Ian, I am trying to bring them to Stoke-on-Trent so they can copy their fine work down my way. We could have some fantastic extracurricular activities, particularly for free school meals, enrichment activities that do not involve classroom activity. I would like to see the school day until 4 o'clock and then 4 to 5 o'clock being very much about extracurricular enrichment and things like that.

I would love to know your views on that and also, as I say, the idea of a shorter summer break and then potentially moving one of the summer weeks into the October half-term instead.

Chair: Darren, your reputation has been enhanced as a union. Do you want to go first?

Darren Northcott: I am grateful, Chair. I have a couple of points on what Jonathan said there.

First, around the length of the summer holiday, it is worth noting—we have talked about international evidence—that if you look across Europe the length of the summer holiday in the UK, certainly in England, is among the shortest. There does not seem to be much of a correlation between the length of the summer holiday and educational outcomes.

Jonathan also touches on a key point that reflects the discussion we were having earlier. There is not much evidence to support simply extending the length of the formal school day and the length of formal taught time by tagging another period onto the timetable. An important and



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potentially fruitful conversation is to be had around many of the wider activities and programmes that focus on children's mental health, wellbeing, and social and cultural development. We can have that conversation. We talked earlier about extended services and extended schools being a model to explore that. We are absolutely up for that, but—

Q1487 Chair: Can I come in on that, Darren? I personally support that it should be predominantly enrichment activities, if it is predominantly used for that, not just a longer school day when you invite the local sports group to come in sometimes, possibly on a Wednesday. I am talking about properly structured longer school day. Would you support a structured longer school day if it were used for enrichment activities?

Darren Northcott: I would not take that off the table, but you would need to work up the proposals carefully. We would be opposed to simply tagging another period onto the end of the formal timetable. That would not work in any event. The evidence does not support it. The point was made earlier about how we would support that in terms of the workforce, bearing in mind the pressure it is under. It would incur significant additional costs. If there is money to be invested, there are better evidence-led interventions that we should be looking at.

Q1488 Jonathan Gullis: Darren, sorry, could I be a pain? Clearly, you talked about the evidence. I did a report with Onward that showed that it would save the average household £133 per week in childcare costs if we were to lose a week. That is money particularly for disadvantaged kids. I also found the evidence and submitted it in a report—I am happy to email it to you—that said that it takes a disadvantaged free-school-meals child seven weeks at the start of the new term to catch up to where they were at the end of the previous academic year having had a six-week summer break. So there is evidence to show that not only will we help working families and households with their incomes, but we will also help disadvantaged kids not fall further behind as that attainment gap widens, which is why I am an advocate for a shorter summer break.

My partner is a teacher, so you can imagine she was not exactly happy with me when I went home with this idea. I said we could have a two-week October half-term when holidays may be cheaper as well for people who maybe want to go abroad or travel within the UK, which is a boost to the travel industry. It also means that teachers and pupils get that rest. That autumn term is exhausting and is tiring for both staff and students mentally.

I would urge caution because we do talk about children's mental health, and it is an important issue. I was a head of year, so I have seen it at first hand. We have to be careful about talking about it so often that we end up creating a crisis within mental health at the same time. Kids are remarkably resilient individuals who will bounce back by being back in a school environment, back in a structured classroom, back in a structured school day among their peers and among their teachers whom they feel



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safe with and trust. We have to remember that normality of returning to school will have a huge mental health impact in a positive way without necessarily having to talk about the need for further support.

I get that CAMHS is a mess. I have seen that at first hand. There is a six-month to two-year waiting list in Birmingham. We should be using some of the sugar tax money. I know sport is important, but I would be flooding the system in the mental health services to start with to deal with the backlog of kids, particularly kids who are ending up in hospital. At one point during the pandemic, all the hospital beds for children who had severe mental health problems were occupied and some children had to go into adult wards, which is a terrifying thing we need to face.

I am not saying it is not an issue. I am saying that the normality of returning to school will help kids socialise and feel safer and calmer much more quickly than what sometimes we as adults realise. Kids are resilient.

Darren Northcott: Thanks, Jonathan. There is a lot of interest in notions of summer learning loss. There is some evidence that rebuts some of those notions around summer learning loss. I would be happy to look at the evidence that you have pulled together and reflect on that.

You also make points about perhaps making sure the discussion, yes, is about mental health, absolutely, but it is about wellbeing, which is a broader concept that we need to think about. How can we make schools engaging and stimulating places where children will want to come? That addresses some of the issues we discussed previously around attendance.

I am happy to have that debate about summer loss. I would still stand by my point that there is not really evidence to suggest a correlation between educational outcomes and the length of the summer holiday, but I know that debate will continue.

Jonathan Gullis: Kevin will convince me on exams, and I want to convince you, Darren, on summer holidays. We will have a fun roundtable one day.

Q1489 **Apsana Begum:** My question is on mental health as well. Before I begin, I want to also declare that I am a member of UNISON.

I want to get a sense of how your members have reacted to the Government's plan for a mental health lead in all schools and colleges by 2025. Do you feel sufficiently supported in delivering that?

Darren Northcott: In principle, it is an important development. In principle, we would support it.

There is an issue about manageability. There is an issue about who in schools might take up that responsibility. I fear—and there is some early evidence of this—that that responsibility will tend to be given to people who are already SENCOs or designated safeguarding leads or both.



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The capacity issue there needs to be thought through. There have been some early discussions with the Department on it and we will continue to have those discussions, but a good idea in principle could founder on the reality of capacity. Someone in a school who has that expertise can share and support colleagues, understanding also that there are other services for children and young people in respect of mental health. Schools have a distinct role. Other organisations have an important role in relation to children and young people's mental health, but we will have to address the capacity issue head on if this will make a positive difference in schools.

Q1490 **Apsana Begum:** By "capacity" do you mean resources, essentially?

Darren Northcott: It is resources, it is time; it is also about support externally from the wider children and young people's sector, supporting the work of schools, working together in partnership to support children and young people's mental health.

Leigh Powell: You will not solve the problem by adding to the job responsibility of just one person. There have been huge cuts to the pastoral side of schools. Many of the people who would have supported young people in the past have disappeared, or their workload has increased so much that they simply do not have the time that they would love to spend supporting young people with their mental health problems. We agree and we support having a mental health lead in schools. It needs to be addressed as quickly as possible. It has been delayed for far too long now and it needs to be in place, but it cannot be the only thing. We need enough staff to be able to deliver on these problems.

We also need to remember the staff's mental health as well, not just the children's mental health, which has suffered over the course of the pandemic. We have done surveys and found in our research that anxiety levels among staff have increased considerably from the first lockdown through the year and into the second lockdown. We have seen real problems there.

We have seen different groups of staff affected differently. If I could pick out a few for you, learning support assistants are really feeling it around their wellbeing and safety in schools. Some 88% told us that their anxiety had increased and was highest in the pandemic. Looking at colleges, assessors and demonstrators who were formerly on teaching contracts have now had some bits taken out of their contracts, so they do not have to be paid quite as much. Some 93% are suffering from anxiety because of their workloads.

A forgotten-about group that we do need to remember is catering staff, who are so worried about their job security at the moment. There was all of that stuff last year about free school meals. The one group of staff in schools who are losing their jobs and having their hours cut and suffering because of that are the catering assistants, the ones who were feeding those children.



Kevin Courtney: Our members are reporting massively increased difficulty in getting access to school nurses or education psychologists or CAMHS. The RCN says that school nurses have declined by 30% since 2010. Those things need to be addressed. We do support the mental health Green Paper and the training of senior mental health leads at schools. I agree with Darren and Leigh that that cannot just be added on to an existing role in a school. There has to be extra funding to create the specific role. This needs to be sped up. The Green Paper is there, and the movement is there but it is far too slow.

As well as that, in terms of mental health we need to look wider. There are all the questions about social media and stuff outside school, but we need to look at the pastoral question in school that Leigh talked about. Some questions of mental health come from the assessment and the accountability reforms, which have squeezed the curriculum and have made the curriculum less welcoming to some students. All of those things need to be looked at as well as the impact of poverty on mental health. The growth in childhood poverty is a real factor in all of these questions as well.

Q1491 **Apsana Begum:** Kevin, are your members also talking about the differences in terms of children when they were out of school and in school? What kinds of things have your members raised about the key challenges for children and young people's mental health now that they are back in person?

I want to flag that we have been aware of rocketing numbers of referrals for eating disorders. That has also brought to light the availability of mental health beds in hospitals as well.

Kevin Courtney: In any crisis you see things you had not seen before. Our members were looking inside children's rooms during the period of lockdown through the Teams or the Zoom chat and saw things that were quite distressing for some of our members. They saw children without any bedroom space at all or sharing. The stresses that came from children being at home were real and are discriminatory in their impact. There is a correlation with being black as well and the worst impacts.

On getting children back into school, our members say that they have to spend a lot of time allowing children to work through some of those things. Zero tolerance on behaviour is not the right way to go when children come back exhibiting all sorts of things that need to be worked through. Our members are spending a lot of time on those issues and reporting, as you say, increased problems with mental health that need to be addressed.

Q1492 **Apsana Begum:** Many of you here were involved with the creation of the education staff wellbeing charter. I have read this in a lot of detail. What tangible actions are required to ensure that all education staff are supported with their mental health? Everyone can sign up to this charter and you deliver a wellbeing strategy, but we all know the problems



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around overworking, workloads, and things like that. What tangible steps should come out of this charter? Can I come to you, Geoff, and perhaps you can also answer the previous question?

Geoff Barton: Sure, let me reference the previous question and then I will take the—

Chair: As concisely as possible, Geoff. I know you have loads to say.

Geoff Barton: First, in terms of mental health, I want to echo what Jonathan said. For some young people, the rhythms and routines of school will get them back into normality.

Secondly, I agree that there needs to be more urgency around those specialists deployed in schools and the capacity. I agree with that.

My third point is to reference what you are saying, which is that schools are community hubs and the more we bring resources there, whether it is after school or during lunchtime, it would seem to me to have huge resonance with the public, who have seen the community roles played there.

On your specific question about staff mental health and wellbeing, the biggest lesson I have had representing leaders and working with leaders is that we have a couple of responsibilities. One is to talk about the issue of mental health and to explicitly describe what we do to look after ourselves. This is me standing up at a Monday morning briefing to say, "Folks, I am going home on Thursday at 4.30 not because I have a governors meeting, not because I have a report to write, but because I want to see my family, and I want you to do the same." The more we legitimise that in the frenzy of school and college life the better. We need to hold a mirror to how we are doing that by surveying staff to get feedback around it. That would be my immediate response.

Leigh Powell: I am glad you brought up the mental health charter. It is a sore point for us. When this was talked about with the DfE for many years, the people involved talked only to the head teaching unions and did not involve support staff unions, even though we asked to be involved. When it was published, it said at the top that it was for all education staff, but if you read through it you will see that it just talks about teachers. The charter was developed by and looks at only 50% of the staff who work in a school. That is a huge problem in the first place.

I asked our members who work in colleges about what support for mental health was going on in colleges and what they thought about it. When I gave them a huge list of all the things that could be available, we found that most of them were available but were not being used.

There are a couple of reasons staff do not want to use them. One is because some people feel that it is a box-ticking exercise. You can put it on your form, and you can tell Ofsted or whoever wants to know that you are providing this stuff for your staff, tick the box, job done, very good.



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Secondly, as I have mentioned before, support staff are first in line when redundancies are announced. Many staff fear that if they tell their manager or their colleagues that they have a mental health problem, they will be first in line for redundancy. They are too scared for that and that needs to be addressed.

Kevin Courtney: The existence of the mental health charter is welcome. It looks at a real issue, which also links to teacher recruitment and retention. We have to look inside at why we need a mental health charter.

I go back to that TALIS report from 2018 comparing teachers in this case from the OECD countries. It found that teachers in England are doing far more hours and have less autonomy and have more scrutiny. We have to look at why that is happening in our country as opposed to in other OECD countries. It is quite marked. We are at the top or the bottom of the league tables—whichever one is bad—for every measure that TALIS and the OECD has on this.

Roughly speaking, teachers are doing the same amount of time in class as teachers in other OECD countries but are doing far more outside class. This is important. Teaching has always been long hours, but long hours preparing exciting lessons for a class isn't the same as long hours preparing evidence for somebody who does not trust you or when the system looks like it does not trust you. We get these examples of teachers who have had to produce 10 pieces of evidence and submit seating plans and lesson plans. The entire feedback is highly placed. This is a vital issue.

Chair: Kevin, we have loads to go through. Apsana.

Apsana Begum: Thank you, Kevin. Perhaps something can be learned about the joint secretary structure you have in your union—co-headships, and things like that.

Q1493 **Ian Mearns:** It seems as though the pandemic has boosted teacher training applications, but there are concerns that this might not be a long-term trend. What should the Department do to help settings retain staff as the country recovers from the pandemic?

I will declare an interest because I helped to establish and I chair an all-party parliamentary group for the teaching profession, which focuses on recruitment and retention issues.

Darren Northcott: Ian, that is an important point. Yes, we have seen a positive move in some indicators around recruitment and retention, but we know that is likely to be a short-lived impact of the pandemic. Once the pandemic recedes, the fundamental drivers of the recruitment and retention crisis we have seen will begin to reassert themselves.

We know what the drivers are, broadly. The OME commissioned some helpful research in the run-up to the STRB process, which set it out



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clearly. We know that workload is a driver. We know that issues around wellbeing are drivers. Pay is a driver. Pay progression is a driver. Lack of professional agency and control are drivers. We know what those drivers are. We know what the strategy needs to address.

Going into the next phase of this in the post-pandemic period, those will have to be front and centre in our strategy. If we do not address them, we will not have the staff in our schools that we need to support education recovery and make sure children and young people get the educational opportunities to which they are entitled. We know what to address. We have to start addressing it.

Q1494 **Ian Mearns:** Is there a residual concern about burnout as well among teachers?

Darren Northcott: Absolutely, given the extraordinary experiences they have had over the past 14 or 15 months. Not just teachers but all staff working in schools have been under extraordinary pressure, which has to be taken into full account when planning how we move forward.

Kevin Courtney: I agree with everything Darren said. We have known for some time that in terms of retention, which is a big problem in our schools, workload is the key issue. But you have to understand it in terms of autonomy, scrutiny, and the type of work. Addressing that really matters.

In terms of recruitment, pay matters for younger teachers as well. Graduates will look at other professions. Having competitive pay matters in that regard and then being able to progress up the pay spine in a sensible way matters.

I do not know whether you will go on to ask about this, Ian, because I know your APPG has raised concerns about it, but we are worried about the Government rushing the ITT market review.

Ian Mearns: You must have a crystal ball, Kevin.

Kevin Courtney: I will let you ask that.

Chair: It was the very next question.

Q1495 **Ian Mearns:** My Chair on this Committee has a particular penchant for the whole concept of degree-level apprenticeships. Do any of you think that degree-level apprenticeships would be an appropriate form of teacher training?

Geoff Barton: From my point of view, Ian, I would want to look at what it is distinctively doing that the traditional route to become a teacher is not. We know from international evidence that the mixture of a strong academic base and then having learned classroom skills appears to be the way to do it. The difference is that in the Shanghais of this world, professional development is not pushed to the edge of the day but is built



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in. They do less teaching because they are doing more preparation. That keeps more people developing their skills and staying in it.

We worry about this review of the market that is going on and we worry about it for exactly the reason that Kevin has said. Doing any review over a summer holiday is not great, but this is high-risk. Yes, this year maybe we are seeing an increase in the number of people saying they want to become teachers, but we know that the tradition over the past seven years has been scrambling around to find enough people. One of the risks is that people like me, who proudly worked with SCITTs and higher education institutions and built those relationships, start saying, "I do not want to have anything to do with it in that case." We need to slow down this consultation, it seems to me.

Q1496 Ian Mearns: A consultation over the summer does seem a bit crass, particularly since it relates to schools and colleges and to the teaching universities in particular.

I was going to come on and ask that in terms of the responsive of members to the initial teacher training market review, but the initial response I have seen from ASCL seems to be a bit sanguine about the market review. Do I have that wrong?

Geoff Barton: It is anything but sanguine. We just have not been very public in our lack of sanguinity, if that is the word.

Q1497 Ian Mearns: All right. I am glad for that clarification, Geoff, and I wait to see your formal response in due course. Kevin, you wanted to come in?

Kevin Courtney: It is worth noting that this is not the only consultation the DfE is running over the summer that really matters to schools. There are reviews of evidence of the timing of the school day, qualifications 2020, the IT market, behaviour strategies and fire safety design of buildings all running over the summer when the Department is asking so much else of school leaders and school staff in general. That has to be a concern. We also join the call to slow this consultation down. We agree with Emma Hollis of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers, who says that these proposals represent "an immediate and catastrophic risk" to the teacher supply chain. It could easily go badly wrong.

We want to build a sense of a profession. That will be the way that eventually solves the teacher recruitment and retention crisis. It requires the strong academic base that Geoff talked about as well as practice in schools and it requires building CPD properly into the school year.

Please, if you have any influence, try to get them to slow this down. We are worried about universities pulling out because they will not want to be dictated to by other universities. We are worried that we might be putting too much demand on schools and schools might fall out of the training.



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We are worried in any case if you build a system that is too strongly led by schools. School leadership on this really does matter, but we need to be looking at geographical provision of teacher training places. We cannot just have that as school led. We have to have a structure that is both providing the academic and ensuring that we have places being advertised and filled across the whole country.

Ian Mearns: In the concept of 87 local hubs being developed in this, not a single one is destined or planned to go in either Kent or Sussex, which seems a tad odd from my perspective, even though I represent a constituency in another part of the country. We are already seeing evidence that, for instance, universities across the board—Universities UK, the Russell Group, Oxford and Cambridge—have all come out with significant concerns about the proposals within this review. I am not sure that this is looking towards school-based but is looking at map-based hubs from that perspective. That is what it looks like. Anyway, nobody is disagreeing with that, so there we go.

Q1498 **Tom Hunt:** This is for all panellists. What is your assessment of Ofsted's performance throughout the pandemic? What are your perspectives on recent changes made to the inspection framework?

Geoff Barton: We were supportive of the changes to the framework. Of course, they have not had much time to bed in yet, but that framework is our friend against a backdrop of people talking endlessly about catch-up and recovery. The implication of talking about catch-up and recovery is that you might be tempted to take a child out of a PE lesson, music lesson or drama lesson to do extra literacy or numeracy. This is about quality, not quantity. That broad balanced framework is good and keeps our minds on the entitlement to young people.

Also, Ofsted has done a helpful job in response to the Everyone's Invited website and the huge, understandable, clamour that followed that. It has helped us to navigate a way through. We are seeing from schools and colleges an understanding that, "Even if I was not named and shamed on that website, I have a responsibility within my institution to make sure that the quality of the teaching of relationships, sex education and all of that, which Ofsted shone a light on in terms of the culture and in terms of the safeguarding, moves up the priority list." That is a job well done.

During the autumn term, when Ofsted was continuing to do visits and then sending letters home to parents, we worried about that. But generally, the feedback from our members is that, in the scale of everything we were dealing with, it was not a problem. In general, the framework is helpful as we move towards some kind of normality.

Kevin Courtney: We think that schools have done well without Ofsted in the last period and have still worked hard to get the provision. We are sceptical of the framework that Geoff is more supportive of. There is the right focus on the curriculum, but Ofsted is correcting for something that it created in the first place. That is the issue we have. All those other



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problems that I was talking about previously around TALIS, the workload and the accountability are driven by the system in Ofsted of top-down accountability. We are asking people all the time to respond to measures that somebody else is giving them.

My children were athletes, they were rowers. It was nothing from the family. They managed to do it on the canal in Hackney. When you set yourself a target, you have no incentive to hit the target and miss the point. Whenever somebody else sets the target in a top-down way, there are all sorts of reasons to work around it. We should have new thinking. Ofsted is a big part of the problem. That does not mean not holding schools accountable, but the mechanism we have is not working.

I agree, though, with Geoff about Ofsted's report into sexism. It—and you—should have read our report of 2018 on sexism, "It's Just Everywhere". The DfE should not have said that Mary Bousted was the cause of sexism in 2016 when she put out a call around it. That report from Ofsted is worth looking at. It is important that we see that sexism in schools has to be addressed on a societal basis as well as in schools.

Q1499 Tom Hunt: I have a quick point on special educational needs. Through visits that I make to schools from time to time and as somebody who is interested in special educational needs, I know that many teachers and heads feel as though the Ofsted framework does not always reward schools and teachers who are putting a big emphasis on SEND and sometimes can perversely work against them. I want to know your views on that and also whether there is enough expertise and understanding of SEND within the Ofsted inspectors.

Darren Northcott: Briefly, in the HMI, which works for Ofsted, there is a high level of understanding around SEND issues, to be fair. There may be an issue about the Ofsted inspectors and training. I know that can vary.

In terms of our members' experience of accountability, yes, Ofsted does get raised, but most of their concern is around whether the performance tables genuinely reflect the work that schools undertake with the pupils they have. I am afraid we do see—it is performance table driven to a large extent—gaming still around the admission of pupils with special educational needs. We still see schools that do not play their full role in admitting and supporting children with SEND.

A SEND review is due and might be added to Kevin's list of things that need to be looked at over the summer holiday. I hope this is a good opportunity to review some of these issues, particularly the interaction between school accountability and what we send in respect of SEND in some instances.

Q1500 Chair: Actually, Leigh, it would be quite good for you to respond to that given the role many support staff have in schools looking after children with special educational needs. Leigh, would you like to respond?

Leigh Powell: Could I get back to you with something on this, please?



Q1501 **Chair:** Yes, of course. Can you do it in a nutshell, Kevin, please?

Kevin Courtney: I agree with Darren about the fundamental concerns about performance tables. We speak to SEND parents a lot. Schools do not get the benefit of the learning that a SEND child does unless they reach particular positions on league tables. That leads to all the wrong sorts of pressures. We have done some research with EPI on unexplained pupil exits from schools. We intend to do some more of that. It is an important issue to come back to.

Q1502 **Tom Hunt:** I guess the sense is that a head teacher should never be conflicted between what they believe is morally right and, not unreasonably, wanting to be judged as professionally successful. There should not be a conflict.

I was particularly interested in special schools. Without knowing much about this before, I would have assumed that people with specialist knowledge in that area went into special schools to assess them. I found out that this was not in fact the case, and that one day an inspector could inspect a regular secondary and the next day could be going into a special school. Does there need to be a little bit more, potentially, thought given to which particular inspector goes into a special school and so on?

Geoff Barton: Can I make a couple of points? There is a bit of an implication in the question—I know you are not saying this, but you will understand that some people could interpret it like this—that what we are saying is that Ofsted's broad and balanced curriculum is a good idea but not for SEND kids. Essentially, there is a democratic sense in what it is trying to assess. Does every child from every background have access to that full broad and balanced curriculum? We would subscribe to that.

For me, one of the problems is whether we have a qualification system and a way of recognising that those young people may need to have something different as a result to say, "I can achieve the dignity of achievement."

Thirdly, in terms of the inspection team, there probably is enough being done when they deploy Ofsted to say, "Do we have the right skillset?" If you are a serving school leader on one of those inspection teams and it is your first time in one of those special schools, it is good because we are starting to build that expertise, providing the lead inspector is rooted in exactly what we should expect as good practice in a special school.

Q1503 **Tom Hunt:** I have spoken to people who are senior in special schools. They have a particular cohort of young people they work with who have different requirements to many young people who do not have that level of need. I could well see how they could be concerned if, say, a traditionalist who had a particular fixed idea of what constituted a good school was going into settings where things are a bit different. There is a reason for that. Often the head knows the young people better than anybody else and knows what works for them.



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Kevin Courtney: Tom's point about inspector specialisms is important and that applies in special school settings. It applies more widely than that and that is part of the problem. The new framework that we have been talking about will lead to English graduates and Ofsted inspectors seeking to have conversations with heads of physics about the physics curriculum being taught. That will not be a good conversation. That then leads to people saying the most protective things in the conversation with the inspector. The question of inspector specialism coupled with the perceived authority that Ofsted has is part of the problem with Ofsted.

Tom Hunt: Finally, it does concern me a bit, particularly when it comes to things like behaviour within a school. It might be the case that an inspector goes to a special school and a young person with particular needs might be rude or might behave in a certain way that seems unacceptable, but actually the head of the school could be approaching that in a slightly different way because it could be that young person's last chance. I am a bit concerned about that but thank you for your responses to those questions.

Q1504 **Chair:** I noticed that Ofsted changed its guidance at the end of June, and it says that where a school is directly deploying tutors to support education recovery from the pandemic, inspectors will consider how their deployment supports the aims of the school curriculum and use of tutors will be integrated into the evaluation of the quality of education, leadership, and management.

Do you agree with Ofsted's decision to emphasise schools' use of tutoring in its revised school inspection handbook that has just come out? I understand it is starting in September.

Geoff Barton: The more that is added to an inspection framework, the more you run the risk of diluting what they ought to be looking at. A lot of us have quite big reservations about this tutoring service, not because we do not think tutoring is a good thing, but we ought to have more leeway in deciding who the people are and how they will approach it.

I do worry a bit if we are simply adding another dimension to Ofsted. Frankly, if you watch me tutoring a young person, how will you judge whether I am doing that well or not? Is it more of a desktop exercise? In that case, is it the best use of an inspector's time?

Q1505 **Chair:** Surely you think that schools should be accountable given the sums of money, £3 billion in total, on all this catch-up?

Geoff Barton: Of course, schools are hugely accountable. The trouble with that logic is that you would have to have people inspecting everything that schools are accountable for. Ultimately, we will see that young people are learning more effectively as a result and are going on to be successful in the future. That is the idea of it. The idea that I would do that only because an inspector might be coming in undermines the moral purpose of the people I lead.



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Q1506 **Chair:** Geoff, is Ofsted inspecting schools using the Baker clause properly? We brought this up with Amanda Spielman when she came to our Committee. The view is that schools are not implementing it and perhaps Ofsted should have it as a significant part of the inspection process.

Geoff Barton: Again, I have concerns about these specific things they are asking about rather than the most important point, which is the quality of the curriculum and the enrichment that happens around that to help a young person's personal development.

Specifically, is Ofsted inspecting the Baker clause well enough? Frankly, I have no idea, but I do know that there is an issue about the implementation of the Baker clause.

Q1507 **Chair:** How would you ensure that the Baker clause is implemented properly so that schools do encourage apprenticeships, UTCs and FE colleges as career options properly?

Geoff Barton: Lord Baker, as I understand it, and the Lords are proposing to bring forward some revised legislation on this so that if a school leader does not want a local college to come in and talk to the year 11 students, it will be prohibited. That happens in relatively few cases, but it would certainly focus the minds if there was an absolute expectation that wherever the young person wants to progress to, they have to have full, independent information around that. Lord Baker has kept the momentum there and I welcome that. It is a good thing in the interests of the child.

Q1508 **Ian Mearns:** This is vitally important. If young people within school settings do not get that independent information and advice and then are not allowed access to guidance so that they can make decisions about their next stages of progressing, it is damaging. It means that the institutions are thinking about the institutions as opposed to thinking about the needs, aspirations, and capabilities of the individual. That is important.

It is regrettable that the Baker clause had to be brought in and is widely not being adhered to, but that is because, unfortunately, as Lord Baker himself recognised, this is a consequence of bums-on-seats funding regimes. Of course, the institutions have to optimise the number of youngsters coming onto their courses so that they can sustain the institutions, but that does not necessarily mean, therefore, that the youngsters are having the best decisions made by themselves or for themselves with their interests at heart. That is a shame.

Kevin Courtney: We want school leaders and schools to behave with the moral purpose that Geoff talked about, whether that is the route goes on after school or whether it is the position of a child with SEND in the school. Head teachers should not have to be brave to do the morally correct thing. So many incentives are built up in the system that work against it. We need to look at that as well.



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Ofsted inspecting that is fine. Ofsted should also inspect MATs. We have the problem that we are creating a system with the wrong incentives and then we will just get Ofsted to look at it and will create another set of perverse incentives. We need to look for a better system of holding schools accountable and a better system of structuring schools with more peer review and more school collaboration.

Darren Northcott: On the Baker clause, I could not have put it any better than Ian has, so I will not repeat that but will just endorse it strongly.

Chair, on your point about Ofsted and the NTP, it is not surprising given the amount of public money going into the NTP that it finds its way into the Ofsted inspection framework. The key point will be to make sure that—Ofsted has got better at this in recent years—Ofsted sets out what exactly it is looking for using blogs and using other forms of public communication, so people can understand what that framework means in practice. Otherwise, the history of the Ofsted inspection framework is that sometimes myths grow up about what Ofsted expects and does not expect and then you get inappropriate responses. If Ofsted will inspect it—and that is not unreasonable—it needs to inspect it in a sensible way that takes account of schools' and colleges' circumstances.

Kevin Courtney: I agree with what Darren has said, but we are sceptical of the tutoring programme and sceptical of the privatisation element of the tutoring programme. We must not reduce education recovery to tutoring and catch-ups for GCSE grades. That will not be education recovery.

Q1509 **Jonathan Gullis:** This is one of my last Education Select Committees. I am sure some people in here will be happy to hear that I am disappearing to talk from the side lines and chunter in articles rather than on here.

Kevin, I have been critical of the NEU. I have called it the "Not Education Union" in the Chamber. I have mentioned it in Westminster Hall debates. Rather than just scowl away in the Chamber, I will say this to your face. The NEU has been out of touch with people throughout the pandemic. It has got it wrong. It has brought the reputation of teachers into disrepute.

NEU advice at the start was that teachers should not be teaching a full timetable or routinely marking. There is an almost 200-point checklist before schools reopen. It was going against the JCVI by saying that teachers must be jabbed first.

By the way, Kevin, this is not just me as a Tory having a go here. Lord Blunkett, the former Education Secretary, said, "I am really, really surprised at Mary and her colleagues' attitude on this—not because I don't understand the risk and the role they play. I'm deeply critical of the attitude. It's about how we can work together to make it work as safely as possible. Anyone who works against that, in my view, is working against the interest of children".



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I have said, Kevin, that the NEU is so out of touch that it has damaged the reputation of teachers. People are telling me that teachers have somehow gone missing in this crisis because the image was that anytime there was an issue, the teaching profession was moaning and groaning, while police officers, firefighters, doctors, and nurses were getting on and tackling this global pandemic.

I have called on you and Mary to resign, Kevin, and I will reiterate that here. It is for the good of the education profession. You will have a different view. You probably want me to resign. That is fine. I will face the electorate. I might get sacked. I might not. All I would say is that the NEU has been grossly out of touch.

Do you accept that at the start of the pandemic you were grossly out of touch with the people, and you were grossly out of touch with the teaching workforce? Does the seemingly much more conciliatory approach that you have been taking on this Committee today mean that the NEU has learned its lessons?

Kevin Courtney: Jonathan, I am sad that you are leaving the Education Select Committee. It is good that a teacher is on the Education Select Committee. I will be at the Conservative conference, as I have been every year since I have been elected, as well as at the Labour conference. I would very much like the opportunity to have a cup of coffee with you there and talk about some of these things.

I absolutely disagree with your characterisation of my union. On vaccination, we took the same position as every other education union took. I have told you already that we then had a meeting with Adam Fine of the JCVI, who went through the reasons, and we put those reasons in public without any criticism of the reasons he had given us and said, "This is why the JCVI has made the decision."

I do feel I need to defend the reputation of my union from your attack. If the Government had taken the steps that we recommended, there would have been far less disruption of education than there has been. If you had taken the step that we recommended in our education recovery plan last summer, of finding extra staff and reducing class sizes, there would have been far less disruption. If you had taken our recommendation in September and October, following SAGE, that there should be a circuit breaker and then a rota operation in secondary schools, there would have been far less disruption. We might not have had the Kent variant. Gavin Williamson said to me in a meeting in October that I sounded like Dominic Cummings going on about the data. Maybe he should have been listening to both of us about the data. Things would have been far less disrupted if you had done what we suggested.

We have 35,000 more members than we did this time last year because education staff think that we have broadly got it right. We are not alone among the unions, but we have broadly got it right. We want to engage.



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You have said you will come around and pack my bags. I will not respond in that childish way, I am afraid. I am willing to engage about these serious matters and about educating our children.

Q1510 Jonathan Gullis: Thank you very much, Kevin. When you suggest reducing class sizes and hiring more staff, hiring more staff is not simple because at the end of the day you want to quality-assure those staff and make sure they are good enough. Reducing class sizes would have led to more disruption because we would have had find the classroom spaces those kids would go into.

At the end of the day, I put these claims to you as the NEU because, ultimately, you and Mary are more interested in playing party politics. The NEU spent £505,000 in the 2019 general election on party campaigns—outspending Momentum, by the way. That is absolutely shocking, and some people have questioned whether it was breaking the Trade Union Labour Relations Act 1992. That was in an article in *Schools Week*. The issue we have here is you paying for Facebook ads to say that the Conservatives are wrong and to back the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green perspectives on these things.

Out of your 35,000 new members, I would love to know how many are paying into the political levy of the NEU because I think it is a tiny percentage. The problem is that you are engaged in playing party politics. You have been caught at Momentum meetings saying, “We are against Boris.” We have a union here and the leadership is not representing the people it represents.

Kevin Courtney: I have also been caught in meetings of the Conservative Education Society in the House of Lords. We are not affiliated to any political party. We do invest in general elections. I am proud of the fact that 750,000 people changed their vote in the 2017 election because of our campaign on education funding, which led to your party offering many more billions of pounds for education in 2019. That is a good thing to have done.

Q1511 Tom Hunt: I will have a coffee with you at the party conference, Kevin. In terms of the points I was raising on SEND, probably I might have agreed with you the most on those from the points that you made.

I do not want to get into a big row about this one, but this is a critical time for education and the issues we have discussed today have been of huge significance to our young people and teaching staff up and down the country, so it was slightly peculiar that the NEU has just published this report on decolonising. I was particularly interested in this point about classroom layouts being racist. I did not understand that point.

Could you explain how classroom layouts are in any way promoting—I do not know—bad things and how changing classrooms layouts will make a big difference to the lives of young people.

Kevin Courtney: I would like to have that cup of coffee, Tom, at the Conservative conference.



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I would urge you to not believe everything you read in newspapers. We had a good conference on decolonising education in December 2019. I am sure you will agree that the issues around racism in schools, with the disproportionate exclusions of black kids, matter. The journalist who wrote the report was looking at report of things people said at that conference. We have taken that off our website recently because it is an old document.

If you want to talk about what we are actually doing in schools on racism, we are saying to schools, "Come and talk to us." Since that report, we have issued an antiracist framework for schools. We had an online conference of 1,000 black educators and we had Lenny Henry and Lewis Hamilton speaking. We had an online Zoom with Jesse Jackson and 8,000 educators, black and white. We are serious about doing work on antiracism.

I am pleased that Sir Lewis Hamilton's commission, which has come out today about the experiences of black people in motorsport, has said, "We support the promotion of the National Education Union Antiracism Charter for schools, and we call on teacher unions and other leadership bodies in education to work with us to ensure the widespread adoption of the Charter." That is what we are doing. It does not talk about the things you talked about, Tom.

Q1512 Tom Hunt: Okay. I will read that in detail. I do commend any efforts that are made to challenge racism in schools. It is clear that young people growing up at school together should be united, should reject racism and should treat each other as equal, whatever their background, whatever anything else. That is to be commended.

There are different views on white privilege and people who are talking about it have a particular understanding of what they mean by "white privilege". Do you at least agree that, if that is going to be taught about in schools, it should be done sensitively and in a way that recognises the immense disadvantage faced every day by many white children from disadvantaged backgrounds? We do not want to do anything that creates a divide here. Poverty is poverty and disadvantage is disadvantage, and that no one disadvantaged group should get any less focus than any other group.

Kevin Courtney: Tom, I have to give you the same answer. The phrases you are talking about were in a report of things that people said at a conference. It was a good conference. People say things at conferences. We wrote a report on the conference and those things were there, but they are not in the stuff that we are sending out to schools. They are not in our antiracist framework for schools. They are not part of what we are saying out into the schools.

We are working on that antiracist framework. We work with Show Racism the Red Card every year. We do not talk in the way that you are talking about it. You are in danger of trying to create a war—maybe a culture



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war—where there is not one. We are not using those phrases in the things that we are saying.

Q1513 **Tom Hunt:** Let us be clear, then. Do you personally believe that white privilege as a concept should be taught in schools?

Kevin Courtney: Why are we talking about what I personally believe? If you want an answer, no, I do not. I do not think that white privilege is a helpful way to frame the question of racism.

From my point of view, the work we do with Show Racism the Red Card is in schools with challenging circumstances. We work with children who exhibit some racism. Sometimes they are from disadvantaged white communities. We talk about why they feel like that, and we work with children to overcome it. But it is always important to note that in any school like that, while some children will have those racist attitudes, other children will say, "I am antiracist. I do not support any of that." No, I personally do not support that framing of matters.

Q1514 **Tom Hunt:** I am encouraged by what you are saying, Kevin. I do not want to have a row with you. I was seeking clarification. That is how it was portrayed in the media. I will read the full framework and we will have that coffee in Manchester.

Kevin Courtney: We should talk about the increase in poverty in your constituency from 27% of children six years ago to 31.4% now. We should talk about the work that my union has done to try to help schools. We have sent money to six schools in your constituency from the £1 million we gave to the Daily Mirror: Castle Hill Junior in Ipswich, Westbourne Academy in Ipswich, Hillside Primary. We are doing stuff to try to help. I would like to engage with you, Tom, about that.

Tom Hunt: Hillside is in my constituency. Those other two are outside, but one is taking kids from my constituency. Yes, we will have that conversation.

Q1515 **Chair:** Thank you, Kevin. I hope I will have a cup of coffee with you, even with our row about the Jewish community and the feelings about that. I do hope that you will adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism as a union. It would be an important step forward and would reassure a lot of Jewish members. Perhaps you would have fewer leaving if you did that. I hope very much that you can do that this year as a union.

Kevin Courtney: We are engaging with the Board of Deputies and with the Community Safety Trust and we are talking with them about the training we are putting on about antisemitism. We have said that we will look at all the examples in the IHRA definition. That is not quite the same as adopting it, but we are engaging with it. We understand there are sensitivities and emotions around all of those things that really matter.

Q1516 **Chair:** Even when I asked the questions I did, I have been contacted significantly by members of the Jewish community and your members. I



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do not want to rehash old ground because we have debated it quite fiercely in this session.

Jonathan Gullis: Just adopt it.

Chair: I do believe that you should adopt it. If your campaign is against antiracism why not adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism?

Kevin Courtney: Let us have a cup of coffee about it.

Chair: If it is good enough for the Labour Party, it is good enough for you. It looks like we will have lots of cups of coffee and I look forward to that, but I very much hope you adopt it, as I say.

Thank you at least for being prepared to debate fiercely on these issues and be subjected to sustained questioning. I also thank all the other union leaders who have come here this morning to answer some serious questions on a range of issues, from the catch-up fund and exams to teacher training and much more.

I give particular thanks to the support staff and UNISON. Often support staff get forgotten about and teachers are always mentioned. When we had a meeting with the Prime Minister and the Liaison Committee last week and teachers were mentioned, I did say, "and support staff, too." Thank you for what you do for your members as well. It is appreciated. I see it in my schools in Harlow every time I visit.

I genuinely wish you all well and thank your members for the work they do to try to keep our children, pupils and students learning.