

Education Committee

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

Wednesday 3 November 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 3 November 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; Kate Osborne; Nicola Richards; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 1026 - 1096

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP, Secretary of State, Department for Education; Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education.

Written evidence from witnesses:



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Nadhim Zahawi and Susan Acland-Hood.

Q1026 Chair: Good morning. Thank you very much for coming. Just for the benefit of the tape and those watching on Parliament TV, could you kindly introduce yourselves and your titles?

Nadhim Zahawi: Nadhim Zahawi, Secretary of State for Education.

Susan Acland-Hood: Good morning. I am Susan Acland-Hood. I am the Permanent Secretary in the Department for Education.

Q1027 Chair: I want to strongly welcome the £2.6 billion extra for special needs. Most people will see that as a very sizeable sum of money. It seems to me that the Department for Education—and I appreciate you have been there for only a couple of weeks—is sitting there like a giant, enlightened Buddha, contemplating before making a decision as to whether to publish the special needs review, which has taken an enormously long time and has been delayed and delayed. Could you let us know when it is going to be published?

Parents who have children with special educational needs, while welcoming the massive increase to £2.6 billion, will want to know that the system is going to be properly reformed. We know that it is not fit for purpose. Every MP who does a surgery—and we all do surgeries—will know that from parents who have children with special educational needs, and who come and see us with the problems that their children face.

Nadhim Zahawi: You are absolutely right. I was the Children and Families Minister in the Department about three years ago, when we introduced the reforms, which I think were the right reforms, in terms of the HCP plans. The review is to make sure that we circle back and see how we can improve the system. When I was Children and Families Minister, I saw really good examples in Lincolnshire, where they co-produced their £50 million investment with the parent panels and stakeholders to deliver great outcomes.

The review is really important. I know that the Perm Sec and my predecessor have been before your Committee to say that it would have been published in the spring and there is a further delay. I know that Christine Lenahan agrees that making sure we get this right is probably more important than simply getting it out of the Department.

You are right to caveat that I have been back in the Department as Secretary of State for only a few weeks. In my view, it really needs to speak to the education White Paper, because you will know that mainstream education plays a big part in our SEND provision.

Q1028 Chair: Will it come out at the beginning of the year or in six months?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am hoping to have it out in the first quarter of next year. I have made a commitment that I will get the White Paper on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

schools out. Part of the reason I want it to dovetail with that is that, ultimately, if we all care about outcomes, we want to get this right. We have not stood still. We went to the Treasury with an invest-to-save bid in SR. It is a trebling of the amount of investment to £2.6 billion. What we did know, which you do not need a review to tell you, is that we needed more capacity.

Q1029 Chair: I started off by welcoming that. It is an enormous sum of money. As you know, it is not just about funding; it is also about reform. I very much hope that, when you are doing that review, you also look at our Select Committee report from 2019 that was published just before the general election.

If I could move on to some other areas before I pass over to my colleague, you will be aware that, just by coincidence, I am introducing today a 10-minute rule Bill, which is supported by a number of Members on this Committee. It is backed by the current and previous Children's Commissioner. It is cautiously backed by Geoff Barton of ASCL, who has welcomed it on the BBC News site. It argues that, before the Government ever consider closing schools again, there is a triple lock: first, that the Children's Commissioner agrees; secondly, that there is a vote in Parliament that is separate from general lockdown measures; thirdly, that, if there is a vote to close schools, you come back to Parliament every three weeks to make sure that Parliament is happy with continued closures.

Enormous damage has been done to children across the board by schools not being fully open—I recognise that they were open to vulnerable students—and to their mental health, educational attainment and lifetime chances. Given the safeguarding hazards that these kids faced, and given that we know that nearly 100,000 children have not returned to school for the most part, will the Government back the Bill?

Nadhim Zahawi: I will take a look at your Bill. In the first week I was appointed Secretary of State for Education, I said that I want to protect education. It was the Monday after the Wednesday when I was elevated to Secretary of State that I joined the Children's Commissioner in her Big Ask survey launch, which was an incredible piece of work.

Half a million children responded to it, including 2,500 children of Gypsy and Roma families and over 16,000 SEND children. What was very clear is that children wanted to be back at school, so protecting face-to-face learning is my absolute priority. I have no plans whatsoever to close schools again.

I know that the way we maintain face-to-face learning is through boosting the most vulnerable in our society, and the booster campaign is critical to that, as are vaccinating 12 to 15 year-olds and the testing programme. We do not want to go back to a world where children are out of school. From the data from the Children's Commissioner, mental health, as you say, was a very big issue for young people. They were



HOUSE OF COMMONS

resilient. This is not a snowflake generation. They were really resilient, but keeping schools open has to be my priority.

Q1030 **Chair:** Are you looking sympathetically at the Bill?

Nadhim Zahawi: As I said, I will take a look at it. I am committed to parents and teachers. I want to again put on record my thanks to teachers; I sent out a letter thanking them in my first week in the job, because they have gone above and beyond. Not only teachers but support staff in schools have done an incredible job. Testing stats in education settings are probably best in breed, if we can compare them to other bits of society.

If you look at what teachers have done to keep schools open, 99.9% of schools are open. Yes, you are right to highlight attendance, which was at 90% and has fallen slightly back to about 88%. I want to look at that and I am sure we are going to get to it in our session today.

My commitment to you is that this Secretary of State will keep schools open, because we know the damage caused by shutting schools. We know, not just from the Children's Commissioner but internationally, how important it is to keep schools open.

Q1031 **Chair:** We know that Belgium lost just 4% of school days. Kids lost 58% of learning in this country, and yet other countries had a lot more and many kept their schools open, even with the most severe lockdown measures. There is a difference between a lockdown sceptic and a school-down sceptic, and I am a school-down sceptic.

I mentioned the Bill, which is being backed and supported also by the pressure group for parents UsForThem. They have been campaigning to get schools back since the outbreak of the pandemic. One of the things they have highlighted is the variation of interpretation and guidance issued by the Department.

Your guidance says, "Given the detrimental impact that restrictions on education can have on children and young people, any measures in schools should only ever be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of schools or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible", and yet different local authorities, public health directors and individual schools are implementing their own rules. Hundreds of thousands of kids are being sent home. The *Telegraph* has highlighted this considerably. In October, Staffordshire County Council reintroduced restrictions across the county.

A few weeks ago, the Department for Education published adverts in the newspapers saying that schools should behave as it was pre-pandemic, yet this does not seem to be happening in some places. How do you plan to ensure that local authorities and Public Health England stick to the guidance? Will you commit to provide stronger guidance to school leadership, local authorities and other stakeholders, so that they understand that you want to keep the kids in school and not have them



being sent home?

Nadhim Zahawi: I hope my message to the profession and, of course, in this Committee session is clear that the best place for children to be is in school. We see it through the evidence from the Children's Commissioner's 500,000 Big Ask survey. The effects on mental health, wellbeing and education are well evidenced. The international evidence you quote, Chair, supports that as well. That is my clear message.

I touched on this in my response to your earlier question. The way you keep face-to-face education open—of course, I understand local outbreaks, and directors of public health have a statutory duty—is by doing two things. We continue to vaccinate at scale, boost the most vulnerable, and continue our 12 to 15 year-old vaccination programme; and use the ability to test. Where I have seen cases that MPs and colleagues have cited to me of directors of public health offering different advice in terms of self-isolation, it is much better to have that student in school and use daily testing as a methodology.

Q1032 **Chair:** If schools are sending significant numbers of pupils home, and you are saying that this is not the way it should be done, surely Ministers, working through regional commissioners and local authorities, should be ringing the schools and asking why it is going on.

Nadhim Zahawi: The regional schools commissioners do that incredibly well, working with schools. Mitigation such as wearing masks in communal areas is the right thing, if the director of public health thinks it is suitable to manage the local outbreak. The most important thing to remember is that we want to keep students in school, in the classroom, learning.

Q1033 **Chair:** What I want to understand is exactly what you have just said: if you see an area where thousands of kids are being sent home—we know that close to a million have been sent home—will one of you in your Department, or senior people, be contacting the schools directly and asking why this is going on, given that the Department published adverts saying schools should behave as if we were in pre-pandemic times? I read the adverts along with everyone else, and there should be much tougher guidance.

Nadhim Zahawi: The guidance is clear on this. You have to also recognise that school leaders and teachers have risen to the challenge: 99.9% of schools are open. Teachers and school leaders work very closely with the regional schools commissioners and local directors of public health. On the whole, if there are areas where we need to engage—regional schools commissioners do engage in this, and rightly so—the important thing to remember is that the evidence and my message to directors of public health locally are very clear that it is vaccination and the use of testing. We have made use of both incredibly well in the education system.

Chair: Everyone would agree that teachers and support staff have done



HOUSE OF COMMONS

everything possible to keep children learning. I thank them and I have thanked them many times in this Committee, but it is just a question of keeping kids inside the school, not at home when they do not need to be at home.

Q1034 Miriam Cates: It is very reassuring to hear your commitment to keeping schools open, but on the testing, many would argue, including me and the Royal College of Paediatricians, that testing is not an evidenced way of managing the pandemic. Rather than keeping schools open, it is sending many children home for long periods of time, during which time they are not receiving face-to-face education, and it is continuing to disrupt their education.

This is in the context of the vast majority of vulnerable people having been vaccinated and the vast majority of UK adults and an increasing number of 12 to 15 year-olds having antibodies. If we had said two years ago that we would test children twice a week for a disease that is not harmful to them and is no longer causing a mass problem in our population, and for them to know that, twice a week, they may be sent home from their friends and classes for two full weeks, we would have said that that was utterly ridiculous and very harmful.

We were supposed to have a review of the testing policy at the end of September, so I am just wondering where we are up to on that and what criteria you will be looking at to end this policy.

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me try to address that both as the Secretary of State for Education and as the previous Vaccines Minister. There are no easy options here. I hear what you say in terms of how young people would feel about testing positive and having to go home, but if we want to keep schools open, and children in education, we have to use the tools available to us.

As the Prime Minister said today, we have to remain humble to the virus. This thing is not over yet. We are transitioning it from pandemic to endemic status. We are not through that transition yet either, hence why the boosters are so important, because you want to protect the most vulnerable. When I took on the job of Vaccines Minister, I said that what the vaccines will do is reduce serious infection, hospitalisation and death by 90%, and they have done that.

If you have a local outbreak, the director of public health has a statutory responsibility to deal with it. If the levers available to them are things like wearing masks in communal areas and using daily lateral flow tests to keep children in school rather than asking them to isolate because they have come into contact with someone who has tested positive, that is a good place to be. I agree with you that it is not ideal, but it is a good place to be to keep education open.

Q1035 Miriam Cates: How would you consider a move to maybe only testing people with symptoms? That would seem a more proportionate response, now that we have moved out of the acute phase of the pandemic.



Nadhim Zahawi: What directors of public health will say to you on this is that, to try to manage local outbreaks and keep education open, you need to test daily, because that is a better way of managing outbreaks. I go back and say to you that none of this is ideal. We are not living through normal times, but we are heading towards getting our lives and our freedoms back. We will probably be one of the first major economies in the world, because of the success of the vaccination programme that you have cited, that will demonstrate to the world how you transition this virus from pandemic to endemic status.

Q1036 **Tom Hunt:** This is to do with vaccinating 12 to 15 year-olds. As you say, it is one of the two key ways in which we can work to keep schools open. You had great success as Vaccines Minister, and thank you for that and for everything you did. I guess that also means that you are in a very unique place to comment and say whether the rollout for 12 to 15 year-olds has always been as good as it could be.

It seems like we have been a bit slower than many other comparable countries to take the decision to go ahead with vaccinating 12 to 15 year-olds. It is something that schools in my constituency have some concerns about. Some were given dates in November, which were pushed back to December. I appreciate that people can go to centres, which seems to have helped things and things seem to be getting better. I just wanted to know whether you feel as though it could have been managed a bit better over the last few months and whether we could have gone a bit more quickly. As you say, it is one of the two key ways in which we can keep schools open.

Nadhim Zahawi: It is a really important question. Let me just say a couple of things on that with my old hat on. All the scientific data suggests that the booster campaign is the one that will make the greatest difference. Why is that? It is because, when you protect the most vulnerable, you reduce serious infection, hospitalisation and death. The booster, by the way, takes the protection to a quantum higher, so this is my message to anyone watching this today: if you are eligible, go and get your booster. It is incredibly important. If you do not, the protection wanes. The upside is that it goes to 10 times the protection from the COV-Boost clinical trials that we did, which is why we are focusing on the booster.

For 12 to 15-year-olds, we always took the decision in this country—and rightly so—to have the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation that gave us, for example, the prioritisation for phase 1 of how we vaccinate, and it worked incredibly successfully. They looked very carefully at the 12 to 15-year-old vaccination data from the US and other countries. They landed in a place to say that it is marginally better to vaccinate than not to vaccinate. They could not recommend a universal programme, so they asked the four chief medical officers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to look at other factors impacting that age group, including mental health, which the Chair just talked



HOUSE OF COMMONS

about. They recommended the universal offer, which we then operationalised.

It is really important to remember that it is different to the first vaccination programme, where we just set up the infrastructure and went for it. We have to get consent. Schools have to do that either in hard copy or in an email. You get those consent letters back and you get volume, and the school-age immunisation system goes in and does the vaccination. We opened up further during the half term to be able to vaccinate in sites. That is all really good and you are going to see the numbers go up. Today, the NHS put out a number of 163,000 12 to 15-year-olds who got the vaccination in the week after the system opened up, so that they can vaccinate in vaccination sites.

Q1037 Tom Hunt: It is difficult. In pretty much the most deprived part of Ipswich, we had one school, which I visited not long ago, which had over 100 kids off because they had caught covid. I know that the difference having one jab makes to transmission is pretty minimal with the Delta variant; we heard that from Professor Whitty, but it does make a little bit of a difference. It is just slightly frustrating because, if we had rolled it out a bit more quickly, it could have prevented perhaps 100 having to take time off. It might have been 60 or 70.

Nadhim Zahawi: This week, the Secretary of State for Health announced further resource and support for the school-age immunisation system, so that it can continue at pace to get to the numbers that we are seeing in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Q1038 Chair: You are very straight talking, so you are not a normal politician in that sense. Can I just ask you about the longer school day? Given the things that we have talked about and the enormous amount of catch-up that is needed, following my question to you in the House of Commons on Monday, should there be a longer school day—yes or no?

Nadhim Zahawi: When we looked at the evidence, some of which has been published already, and we are going to publish more of that evidence, it became very clear that you need to target disadvantage. You need to look at those children who have the least time available left to them to catch up, so the 16 to 19-year-olds. That was why I recommended, and we were successful in our SR bid, that we focus £800 million on 16 to 19-year-olds for at least an additional one hour a week, so 40 hours of education. That was the right thing to do.

Q1039 Chair: Should there be a longer school day? All that is great and really welcome.

Nadhim Zahawi: I hope you will agree with this. You and I are both interested in outcomes. I have an evaluation programme and we have published some work on primary and secondary. It looks like it is moving in the right direction in primary reading, as well as in maths, but less quickly. Secondary is another area of focus, which is why the additional £1 billion of funding that we got to focus on disadvantage and—



Q1040 **Chair:** What is the answer?

Nadhim Zahawi: My answer is this, Let me deliver that £5 billion, continue to evaluate, come back to your Committee and show you, I hope, how well we have done, because the evidence suggests that targeting and extending the day for 16 to 19-year-olds, which we are doing, is the right thing.

To answer your question that you asked me on Monday, there are already great examples of MATs that have chosen to have a longer day, and I want to look at what they have done and encourage the spread of good practice. We now know, because we have some great research capability in the Department, that the average day is 6.5 hours. I would urge school leaders who are below the average to look at moving towards the average day. What I want to do is come back to you. It is not a question of an arms race—"Let us chuck more money at this". I have £5 billion; let me make it work.

Q1041 **Chair:** The Department, rightly, in my view, supports the excellent Education Endowment Foundation, which found that extending the school day has academic benefits. We know that 50% of knife crime among young people is committed between the hours of 4 pm and 6 pm. There are statistics from DCMS that say that it increases numeracy if you have sporting activities during extra hours. There is a fair whack of evidence. I just want to understand whether the Department made the case for funding an extended school day in its spending review bid.

Nadhim Zahawi: The evidence that we undertook suggested to us that the best case to make, which is the case that I made and which we were successful in, is to extend by one hour a week for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Q1042 **Chair:** That is one hour a week. I am talking about an extended school day. Did the Department make the case for funding an extended school day?

Nadhim Zahawi: The Treasury was very open to us looking at different scenarios, but simply extending the school day would then move you away from targeting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, and the ones with the greatest gap in attainment.

Q1043 **Chair:** In June, the Department established a review looking into evidence in terms of a longer school day, and you said that you would set out your findings in advance of the spending review. I appreciate that this is before your time, so if I can ask you, Susan, will the Department share with the Committee the extended school day review and its findings?

Susan Acland-Hood: Yes. We expect to publish that shortly.

Q1044 **Chair:** When you say "publish shortly", that is, in Civil Service terms, a very elastic term. How shortly is "shortly"?

Nadhim Zahawi: We will make sure that it is very shortly.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q1045 **Chair:** Is that before the end of the year?

Nadhim Zahawi: Yes.

Q1046 **Chair:** In the review, were you able to look at schools that have lengthened the school day already? We know that 39% of academies started before 2010 successfully have longer school days. Have you evaluated the impact that this policy has had on improving academic attainment?

Susan Acland-Hood: Again, you will see it when it is published, but we looked at domestic and international evidence on the longer school day.

The one thing I was going to draw out is that, when you look at that evidence, it has been a really good thing that we have put attention on time in schools, but one of the clearest things that comes through the evidence base is that quality eats quantity for breakfast. The single most important thing to invest in is the quality of the education that is going on in the classroom. Net-net, you are better to invest in quality than quantity, if you want a straight choice, which is why we are focusing, for example, on things like the early career framework and NVQs, and making sure that we are continuing to increase the quality of education.

However, you can, of course, make a case that says, if you can increase time at very good quality, there may well be some benefits there. Those are the choices and trade-offs we were looking at as we went through the review and the spending review with other colleagues.

This is an area in which one size does not fit all. We really want headteachers up and down the country, who know their schools and understand their children well, and to think about time in the school day, in a way that we have not encouraged them to do for some time. This has been devolved for a very long time. It is not something that we have set policy on, certainly in my memory of the education system.

The first step in this is, as you say, to continue to look at the schools that have chosen to extend time. They have done it in different ways and to different levels of effect. There are quite a few schools that used some of the catch-up funding we gave them to think about that. We also need to encourage headteachers, school business managers and leaders in schools to think about this as another choice in their armoury when thinking about how they want to deploy their resources and investment.

Q1047 **Chair:** Why not just, as I suggested on Monday, have a proper, formal trial in a couple of disadvantaged areas around the country, where you fund quality and longer school days? If it works, there will be a much better case to make to the Treasury.

Nadhim Zahawi: I think we have made the right case to the Treasury, focusing on delivering the £800 million and the additional one hour a week for 16 to 19-year-olds, and focusing on delivering the additional £1 billion for secondary and primary education, in terms of, as Susan



HOUSE OF COMMONS

pointed out, both quality and outcomes. Remember that we have a big scale-up on the tutoring programme. We have done well. More than 300,000 students have had that tutoring, which used to be the remit of wealthy parents and is now being delivered to all our schools. They get the opportunity to take advantage of that. We have a big scale-up to get to 6 million.

Chair: All that is welcome.

Nadhim Zahawi: My point is that you cannot hug the world, Chair. You would know this better than anyone. Delivery, success and outcomes for those kids have to be my priority.

Q1048 **Kim Johnson:** Picking up on the issue of extending the school day, you have already alluded to the fact that teachers have gone above and beyond. My question is about who will be responsible for delivering these extra hours, and how. If it is about changing teachers' terms and conditions, what discussions have been had with trade unions about that?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is the whole point. My focus at the moment is on the £800 million investment for the additional 40 hours for 16 to 19-year-olds. We have the funding to deliver that additional one hour per week. We have the funding to deliver the tutoring and to deliver what teachers and the unions asked for, which is to give the flexibility to school leaders as to how they deliver the recovery for their students. We have all that.

The Chair is asking whether we are going to a longer school day. No, we are not, on the whole. What we are saying is that we have targeted funds to deliver. Remember, of course, that the core schools budget has had a significant uplift. The sector was budgeting to a set of numbers that are now £1.6 billion higher in 2022-23, if I am not mistaken.

Q1049 **Kim Johnson:** Unfortunately, a lot of schools have suffered significantly as a result of 11 years of austerity. A lot of schools do not have the resources that used to be available or the same level of teaching assistants, for example, to provide that extra tuition and support to the disadvantaged children we are talking about at the moment.

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me just bring it to life for you. The school system was budgeting to a set of numbers. For 2022-23, they would have had £52.3 billion. What we have been able to do this spending review is increase that by £1.6 billion, which is above where they thought they were going to be in 2022-23, plus the £5 billion that is going into recovery. I certainly recognise that that funding was needed in order to get schools to where they need to be on recovery and what they need to deliver going forward, including delivering on our manifesto pledge of getting the starting salary to £30,000.

Kim Johnson: You are still trying to fill a very big hole, but thank you for your answers, Minister.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q1050 **Chair:** My problem with this is that you have not said yes or no. I cannot understand, given all the evidence that is out there and what we were told, why you will not just do some serious pilot schemes and properly evaluate them, so that you could find out, as long as it is quality. I am not saying that kids should be learning algebra until 8 pm either. A lot of it should be sporting activities and mental health wellbeing, as well as catch-up. If you did some proper pilots based on that, you could be sure whether or not it is a good thing that would help kids catch up.

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me be clear. First, my focus is to spend the £5 billion of recovery money well.

Q1051 **Chair:** Yes, but I am talking about a longer school day here.

Nadhim Zahawi: I am going to get there. Secondly, we know that the average school day now is 6.5 hours. I want to see school leaders move towards the average. Thirdly, I do want to spread best practice and look at what that best practice looks like in those families of schools that you, quite rightly, quoted at me, to see how we can share that best practice across the sector in terms of the use of a longer school day. My priority has to be delivering the massive scale-up.

The toughest thing in Government—and you and I both know this—and in the private sector is scaling anything. We are at a stage where we are about to deliver £6 million of tuition. It is a big challenge and I need to make sure that we do that well.

Q1052 **Chair:** That is why I was saying just set up some pilot schemes. I am not asking you to say that, tomorrow, every school should have a longer school day. I am asking you just to do some pilot schemes to really evaluate if they work.

Nadhim Zahawi: My preference is to look at best practice and then share it. We know that we have that already.

Q1053 **Chair:** If you find that best practice is pretty astonishing, will you then return to this issue seriously?

Nadhim Zahawi: First, you know me—I am a great fan of evidence-led strategy. Secondly, there is another lever, which is Ofsted, and Ofsted will do a thematic inspection report on time, if we ask it to, so I can certainly look at what is available. Human resource is the most valuable resource. I have a great Department and a great set of teachers and headteachers.

Q1054 **Chair:** I get it, but I am not saying do the whole thing tomorrow. I am saying have a couple of pilot schemes in a couple of areas.

Nadhim Zahawi: Focus is what gets you to results, which is outcomes for children.

Q1055 **Chair:** You just said that you are evidence-based. What I want to ask you is just to be clear about what is happening with BTECs. My focus is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

outcome. Pupils who take BTECs are more likely to be in a job and receive higher earnings than their peers. If you look at the Education Datalab, it shows that pupils who take BTECs are more likely to be in employment by age 22 compared with peers who take A-levels, and that they earn £800 a year more on average. Will you give a guarantee, given what you have said about BTECs, that, until the T-levels are properly rolled out and fully in place, any student who wants to do a BTEC will be able to do one?

Nadhim Zahawi: I will absolutely give a guarantee that we will not kick the ladder of opportunity away from anyone. Let us just review where we are at. If you look at the United Kingdom in terms of qualifications, not just BTECs but general qualifications, we have 12,000 compared to international competitors that have 500.

Chair: No one objects to pruning it. I get all that.

Nadhim Zahawi: We will not get rid of quality BTECs, so I want to squash that narrative that has somehow built up from I do not know where.

Q1056 **Chair:** There will be a pruning, but will most students be able to do a quality BTEC if they want one until the T-levels are rolled out?

Nadhim Zahawi: The real difference is T-levels. I want T-levels to be as famous as A-levels.

Q1057 **Chair:** There is no dispute about that. What I am asking is, until they have been fully rolled out, whether students will be able to do a quality BTEC if they want to do one, given what I have said to you. You are focused on outcomes. As I said to you, some of them earn more than A-level students.

Nadhim Zahawi: I would caveat and add to your statement to say that you have to look at level 2 as well. We are looking at reforms of level 2. I want outcomes. If you agree with me that we are evidence-led, the outcome for that young person to get a career that is fulfilling for them is the right place to be. A by-product of that is higher wages.

Q1058 **Chair:** With a BTEC, they are more likely to be in employment by age 22 and earning 800 quid more.

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me also give you a stat. People on BTECs are three times more likely to drop out of higher education, so we have to ask ourselves some tough questions here. Why is that happening? The reason we have introduced T-levels is that we want that fusion. I met this brilliant young man at Barnsley College who was doing a T-level. I asked, "Why are you doing this T-level?" *[[Interruption.]* Let me just get to the point.

Q1059 **Chair:** No, I get it. I know what you are saying. I am fully in favour of T-levels. I just think it is vital, given that BTECs are significant ladder to disadvantaged pupils, but that is not the reason. The important reason is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that they are more likely to get a job than those who do A-levels, according to the Education Datalab's stats, which I have just quoted to you. All I am saying—and I do not think it is unreasonable—is that, until the excellent and prestigious T-levels have been fully rolled out, any student who wants to do a quality BTEC, with the pruning understood, can do so. That is all I want to know.

Nadhim Zahawi: I am keeping the quality BTECs. We want students to be able to get that job. Part of that is what we are doing on level 2, so that we give people an opportunity. "Never take an opportunity away from people". That is my mantra. We cannot do that. The right thing to do is to make sure that we evidence this as we scale up T-levels. If we see that there are gaps where there are no T-levels, of course we will keep the BTECs.

Chair: So the answer to my question is yes. You agree that they will be able to do quality BTECs until T-levels have been fully rolled out.

Susan Acland-Hood: I just want to split this down a little bit—

Chair: In a nutshell, because I am going to bring in my colleague.

Susan Acland-Hood: We have never had a proposal to defund all BTECs. We have always said we wanted to keep high-quality BTECs, particularly those that do not overlap with T-levels. The area of difficulty here is where you have a BTEC that overlaps with a T-level. One of the things about our system that we know is very difficult for young people and employers at the moment is that it is confusing, in that we have a very large number of overlapping qualifications.

The principle that we should be focusing on is that there should be a really good-quality vocational and technical qualification available for a young person in an area that they can take. When we look at what has happened in the past with the introduction of new vocational and technical qualifications, where people have made the commitment that the one will not be taken away until the other is fully established, what tends to happen is that you end up with an even more complicated and confusing landscape.

The critical thing is that we are not going to remove BTECs where they do not overlap with T-levels, and we will make sure that we do not remove those that overlap with T-levels until the T-levels are available, but that may be different from them being fully rolled out. For example, we have three T-levels that started last year and are just starting to be well-established. The way we will work on the replacement may need to follow the development of the T-level courses.

Chair: The worry is that the cart is coming before the horse. That is the problem.

Nadhim Zahawi: That is why we need scale and spread, to your point.

Q1060 **Christian Wakeford:** I declare an interest in that I am chair of the APPG



on T-levels. I find it highly refreshing, when we are talking about level 3 qualifications—and we are doing a lot, rightly so—to hear you talking about level 2 qualifications for all those who are not quite ready for A-levels or T-levels. I would like to hear a bit more about that.

My concern in regard to the BTEC/T-level argument is that some of the placements just are not there. Speaking to some of my local colleges about trying to find a placement in areas like the science BTEC, the T-level could be amazing on paper, but if you cannot get a placement it is worthless. What are we doing from a logistical perspective to make sure that, to quote you, the placement matches the qualification?

We have just had the first anniversary of T-levels and we have seen them expanding this year. Where do we see them going for the second anniversary?

Nadhim Zahawi: Christian, it is great to see you. I hope the convalescence is going well. I know it has been difficult.

We have big ambitions, which Susan just quoted. We have three T-levels, going up to 23. We have 44 providers and will go up to over 400. All FE colleges will be doing BTECs by 2023. This is another big scale-up. You will hear from this Secretary of State about the focus on the operational rigour of how we get this done. You make a very good point around the placements. Making sure that we have the resources to deliver that, with business, is going to be critical.

To the discussion we just had earlier about whether we should do lots of other pilots, Susan and I are so focused on making sure we deliver operational rigour and scale-up, because that is the only way you really deliver change. Those are the numbers.

Let me give you the numbers, because they have just been put in front of me. In 2020, there were three T-levels and 43 T-level providers; in 2021, 10 and 105; in 2022, there will be 16 and 188; we will get to 23 and 400 by 2023. The incentive scheme launched to help mitigate some of the impact of covid on employers, which is a payment of £1,000 to employers hosting a T-level industry placement between May and July of this year, is something that I want to see us build on.

You are right: to make this a success, we need industry and business engagement. One of the first things I did was to speak to the CBI president's dinner. I said, "I am responsible for an economic Department, because the most valuable resource is the human resource. I need you to engage with me". Businesses are very ready to engage with us.

Q1061 **Christian Wakeford:** On the back of that, we teach it, so we should also preach it. To what extent do we see a politics T-level coming forward, where we can offer placements with MPs as well? It is the best way to move forward.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nadhim Zahawi: I guarantee that your Chair will be the first person wanting a T-level.

Chair: I have already started a parliamentary apprentice scheme.

Nadhim Zahawi: You certainly did. I remember you were the first to do it, Chair. It is an important part of what we do and something that I shall definitely take away and look at very seriously.

Q1062 **Nicola Richards:** Secretary of State, on the topic of placements and work placements, I have been doing some work with Policy Connect. I co-produced a report into careers called *Transition to Ambition: Navigating the Careers Maze*, which we can send over to you after this for you to have a flick through. It is about all the options available to young people, and we found it was very confusing.

After the pandemic, young people have really lost out on those important work placements and getting work experience. It is something that I found really useful and is why I am in politics. I did work experience with my local MP when I was 16. Do you think that those work placements are important? If so, will you be encouraging schools to make sure that they have time out of school to have proper work placements that are not done virtually?

Nadhim Zahawi: The simple answer is yes. It is important that that happens. We are also looking at that interaction with business. The skills Bill is coming back to our side of the House, and I am looking at how we can look at the Baker amendment and have something that delivers more of that. Again, I would commend your Chair, because he has been a champion of making sure that careers advice really does work and works well.

We had 101,000 apprenticeship incentive payment claims so far, 76% of which were for under-25s. This is real engagement from SMEs. If truth be told, our biggest challenge is with SMEs. Larger organisations in the corporate and public sectors are on the right track. Apprenticeships in the Civil Service are at about 3%. It would be great if we could all get into the 5% club, which I know is something that the commercial world is really engaged with. We need SMEs to engage with this. Part of that is about making the process as frictionless as we can and simplifying it.

When I was the apprenticeship tsar under the coalition Government, the nugget that I got from Germany and Switzerland was that everyone understood the system: first, because it has been stable for decades; secondly, because everybody understands how it works, whether you are a student, a parent or an employer.

Q1063 **Nicola Richards:** When we spoke to Her Majesty's chief inspector, she said that, although the Gatsby benchmark is important to understand how a school meets that, it is not a priority in Ofsted's view, because it can only have so many priorities. Do you think that that is correct or should it have a greater importance in those inspections?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nadhim Zahawi: I get exactly what Her Majesty's inspector is talking about. It goes back to what I was saying to you earlier. Operational rigour requires focus. Of course, we want to do lots of other things, but the important thing is to focus what the inspector does on what we need the inspector to do. We have other levers available to us. Susan keeps telling me about how important the Gatsby stuff is.

Susan Acland-Hood: I do. The Gatsby benchmark is very powerful. As you probably know, there is quite a strong association: as a school meets more of the Gatsby benchmarks, it is associated with something like a 1.8% reduction in NEET rates per benchmark, which is quite a significant and impressive effect size. We have seen more and more schools meeting the Gatsby benchmarks over time, but this is one of those things where the starting point should be support.

Accountability is important, but I do not think that most schools are seeking to give their children a poor careers experience. Some of this is about making sure that we make the connections with employers easier for both the employer and the school, and that we make sure that that understanding is there about what good-quality careers advice looks like.

The Gatsby benchmarks are also powerful because they are simple; you can understand what they are and how you have to do them. In areas where we have careers hubs, we have seen a particularly strong increase in the number of schools meeting the Gatsby benchmarks and giving that really good-quality careers support that includes experience with employers and proper experience of the world of work.

For me, the critical next stage is to expand that network of careers hubs and continue to consistently and rigorously build that support for schools, so that they can do this well.

Q1064 Tom Hunt: On this topic of the widening attainment gap and in terms of the Ofsted framework, it is a pretty new one from 2019 and has not had a huge amount of time to bed in. To what extent is it in scope, if you believe it is not working in the right way, to make significant changes, bearing in mind that it is still quite a new framework?

In relation to special educational needs, frequently, when I talk to people in the sector whose life is providing special educational needs support for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, they say that they believe the Ofsted framework and the way that schools are assessed does not always reward them for the great work they do.

Surely, the focus for Ofsted should be on measuring a positive difference made by that school. It should take into account that not every school has the same proportion of young people with special educational needs or children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Even though the framework is pretty new, if you, Secretary of State, felt that it was not working in the right way, is there ample scope for you to make significant changes?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nadhim Zahawi: My engagement with Ofsted is incredibly important. This is my third stint in the Department, initially as the apprenticeship tsar and then Children and Families Minister. I worked very closely with them on the children's social care side and getting that right.

If I step back, what they are doing is outstanding, in my view, but do we have challenges in the system? Of course we do. If we look at alternative provision, something like 85% is judged good or outstanding by Ofsted, but only 5% of pupils got 9 to 4 in GCSEs in English and Maths in 2018-19, compared to 66% of pupils in state-funded mainstream. What are we doing in AP to improve that outcome? What are we doing for SEMH or SEN children? There are so many challenges around children's families that simply saying that I can use the lever of the inspector and jump to that conclusion may not be right. That is really what I am trying to say.

Q1065 **Tom Hunt:** If you are a mainstream school and you get a reputation locally for being really good when it comes to meeting the needs of young people with special educational needs, not all may have plans. Some may have things like dyslexia and dyspraxia and still need that extra support. If they get that reputation locally, it is likely that more parents are going to want to try to get their kids into that school. That mainstream school is going to have a growing number of young people with special educational needs, but that comes with challenges. Sometimes we have a system that is too tilted towards outcomes. We would not want that school to feel like it is being punished for getting a great reputation locally for the job it does.

Nadhim Zahawi: Absolutely, and in my time as Children and Families Minister I saw some brilliant examples of schools that have really done well in mainstream for SEN students. We want to make sure that we encourage that. Part of the investment that we spoke about at the outset—the trebling to £2.6 billion—is in mainstream, not just in specialist schools. You are right. Where there is a challenge for me is to make sure that all mainstream schools are SEN schools. I need to send the message very clearly to the sector that that is what this Secretary of State expects.

Q1066 **Tom Hunt:** Just finally from me on this point, I was delighted to hear about the extra £2.6 billion. I was very pleased to hear that. I just want to talk very quickly about opportunity areas. Ipswich has benefited from being an opportunity area. We appreciate that. There are only 12 nationally and we are one of them. Minister Quince visited recently and it was a very successful visit. We were pleased that the funding was extended, but there is a little bit of concern that we do not want all the good work to get lost. There is a bit of concern about a cliff edge and making sure that there is a permanent legacy from the opportunity area. I just want to know if you had been thinking about how that could be locked in.

Nadhim Zahawi: I smile only because I was the Children and Families Minister when we really doubled down and focused on opportunity areas.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

When you look at the good ones, you mention Ipswich and the stuff I saw in Bradford was incredible. The glasses for schools programme came out of the opportunity area evidence. The research showed that, if you provided free specs for the most disadvantaged children, they did better because they could see the blackboard or the new technology that is in front of them. Where they do it well, they do it exceptionally well. That is really great and we must not lose it.

One thing we looked at when I was Children and Families Minister was the opportunity area in a box—i.e. how can you try to scale it to other areas in a cost-effective way? One thing they have done well—again, I am going to look closely at it with Minister Quince—is the twinning of opportunity areas with other areas and that learning.

The other area I am going to look at with Michael Gove on levelling up is how you take some of the best learnings from opportunity areas, one of which is local leadership. We know that, when you have really inspirational local leadership that brings in schools and local government, things begin to really happen. We then need to focus on the evidence of how we do levelling up with Minister O'Brien and Secretary of State Gove.

Q1067 Christian Wakeford: Moving back to the disadvantage gap, that was really narrowing pre-pandemic and we were doing a lot of good work on that. However, the result of school closures has seen it start to widen again. What plans does the Department have to tackle this gap and to reverse that widening?

Nadhim Zahawi: There are several things. First, we have addressed what we are doing on recovery and, in the interests of time, I do not want to go over everything on that, but that is significant work because we are targeting disadvantage in secondary and primary.

Secondly, the core schools budget gives more headroom with the additional £1.6 billion. Part of that will go on things like NI costs, which are about £300 million. Nevertheless, it does give a bit more headroom for schools to use money to target. The message from them was, "Give us some flexibility. Let us target".

Thirdly, you have the pupil premium, which is rising by about £60 million, so there is an ability to target through that. Part of the national funding formula on the core schools budget allows for targeting. What I would suggest is the right thing to do, which is what we are doing, is to target by school. That is the best way of doing this. On the whole, if you follow the resources, they are very much going towards closing that gap.

The other part of that, which is really exciting, is early years and family hubs. Again, I am going to remind this Committee and people watching that Robert Halfon took me to Harlow to look at the family hub concept. Where you have multiagency support for those families who do not normally engage with Government services, amazing things happen. Getting midwifery and the vaccination when a new baby is born, and then



grafting on top the early-learning evidence and the support that we do in DfE, you begin to really change outcomes. We know that 40% of the gap is pretty much baked in by age five and the balance by age 11. It is really big and exciting.

Back to what I was saying the other day, skills, schools and families are three massive opportunities for us to deliver on.

Chair: I should say that the Harlow family hub, which is run by Essex Council and Virgin Care, has now had three mentions in the past three days in Parliament. They are incredibly happy with the mention and support that you have given them.

Q1068 Christian Wakeford: You are preaching to the converted in terms of early years. If you get that right, you set a child's educational career for the long term. When we are talking about the disadvantage gap, it is arguably those most deprived and most disadvantaged who really suffered through repeated isolations, predominantly in areas like the north-west, where we were in heightened restrictions from 31 July last year. I can think of children in my own constituency who have isolated 10, 11 or 12 times, when there has been very little IT equipment et cetera at home. I know that there was a big programme at the time of rolling that out. They are the children who need the greatest attention.

When we are talking about exams next year and giving everyone the same benchmark—"This is what you are studying"—that does not really level up those children. It just gives them the same area to look at learning. If someone has already learned that in school, that is great, but what if you have not, because you have been missing? How will we be looking at doing that more on a regional basis, with a much greater focus on those areas that have been isolating more and have had heightened restrictions?

Nadhim Zahawi: One of my very early priorities was to work with Ofqual and to ask, "How do we create a system that takes us back to doing exams"—which is the right thing to do—"but is fair?" If we put fairness at the heart of this, we will get to the right place, because, as you quite rightly quote, Christian, there are some students who have really missed out on a lot of education.

I pay tribute to my predecessor for getting the 1.5 million laptops out, and getting an internet connection to 33,000 families. I think over 100,000 got routers as well as an internet connection. That was all really good, but we know that online education is no substitution for face-to-face, back in schools. We are determined to keep schools open and to keep children in school.

What I did with Ofqual was to say that it would be unfair to go to pre-pandemic grading, because that would really damage the prospects of those young people, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, as you say. We took the decision to go to the mean, halfway between where we are today and pre-pandemic, but also to add support, through Ofqual



working with schools and delivering much greater clarity on what parts of the subject they will be examined on, which gives us a good place to land in terms of fairness and rigour.

Internationally, this is important: Ofqual remains one of the best regulators in the world. We want that reputation for rigour to remain for the United Kingdom and for England. I am working with my devolved colleagues to make sure that we are all moving in the same direction.

That is what we did and I think that is the right thing to do. I also sought their reassurance that the human factor will always trump the statistic, because each statistic is a student and a family, and what happened with the whole issue last time was unfortunate.

Q1069 Christian Wakeford: Sticking with the theme of regional disparity, your predecessor told us in his last accountability hearing that lower rates of take-up of the NTP in certain areas were starting to be driven by the regional schools commissioner to up that level. How has that nudging played out so far? Has it been a success? Is that disparity closing or do we still have problems in particular areas?

Nadhim Zahawi: In terms of in-school help, I quoted during questions that we now have just under 500 schools in disadvantaged areas that have an academic mentor in them. I am looking to get that to 1,000, which begins to address the issue you are talking about.

There are three pillars to this. You have the tuition partners, which is good, academic mentors, and the new one is where we listen to schools and school leaders. Teachers have said, "Allow us to hire in someone who we think is the right person, in school, full time". There are three routes, and all three will begin to address that, but I would just say that this is a massive scale-up challenge.

Q1070 Christian Wakeford: On the back of that, I have spoken to the Tutor Trust a number of times, mainly because it is a constituent. Its concern with moving to Randstad and having it co-ordinate was that that was removing choice and competition, and making it much more difficult for tutors to be involved, especially when it was a small company. It was felt that that was more damaging to children, so what are we doing in terms of making sure that all options are available and not just the recommendations?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is important that we make sure that we are operationally on top of this and I give you my commitment that that is happening under my stewardship. Susan has been very deeply involved in the original programme with the providers EEF and Teach First, which gave us a good idea of what the operational challenges are. They performed incredibly well; 300,000-plus students have received that tutoring. In terms of the scale-up now, Randstad is not doing it on its own. There are a load of suppliers below Randstad that are really good and highly skilled at delivering, including for SEND. There is a real focus



HOUSE OF COMMONS

on how we do this operationally and we are giving schools the freedom to—

Chair: We have a fair bit still to go through.

Nadhim Zahawi: Susan would just like to come in very quickly.

Chair: In a nutshell, literally.

Susan Acland-Hood: I was only going to say we increased the open access with Randstad for other tuition partners to work with it. We have 41 approved tuition partners that work with Randstad, which I think I am right in saying is more than we had with EEF, not fewer.

Q1071 **Christian Wakeford:** What is the rate of take-up of NTP among pupil premium pupils, which is where it needs to be targeted the most? What percentage of pupils enrolled in the NTP are eligible for the PP?

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me write to you with the exact data, because I do not want to just give you data off the top of my head. Suffice to say our focus is very much about giving schools the flexibility to really focus on disadvantage.

Q1072 **Kate Osborne:** Good morning, Minister. I just wanted to ask you about anti-vaccination protests outside schools. A survey conducted by the Association of School and College Leaders and published last month highlighted that schools were targets of anti-vaccination protesters. Labour believes the law around public spaces protection orders urgently needs to be updated, so that local authorities can prevent anti-vax protests outside schools. What steps, if any, has your Department taken to protect schools from being targeted by anti-vaccination protesters, and what else can be done to stop this?

Nadhim Zahawi: There are several things. We have given support and clear guidelines to school leaders and teachers that, if there are anti-vax threats—by the way, it is unacceptable, in my view, for any school leader or teacher to be harassed, threatened or approached by anyone, including anti-vaxxers—they should be in touch with both the local authority and the school-age immunisation team, to make sure that they can support them in delivering the vaccination programme.

I have had a commitment from the Home Secretary that, if the police are required—and I go back and say it is totally unacceptable for any school leader to be in any way harassed by anti-vaxxers—the Home Secretary will deliver every resource that schools need to make sure that they are protected. This is absolutely wrong and unacceptable.

Q1073 **Kate Osborne:** To what levels have these protests have been taken? Do you know how many? Have schools been able to cope and to get the help that they have needed?

Nadhim Zahawi: On the whole, if you look at the evidence, it has been really successful. When I talk to my old team at health and the school-



HOUSE OF COMMONS

age immunisation programme, they have done really well in engaging with schools and school leaders and, of course, doing the work of the vaccination part of this.

If you look at vaccine positivity overall in the United Kingdom, we are in the premier league, whether it be the 12 to 15-year-olds or the older age cohorts, because we have shared the data and the information. You have JVT out on the airwaves today, Chris Whitty before your Committee and, more widely, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation being really careful and rigorous in looking at the evidence on this. As long as we continue to share the evidence and be transparent, that is how we win the argument.

We need to make a very clear difference between people who may be hesitant and want more information—and it is right to supply them with that information—and those who are anti-vaxxers. As I say, in my mind, there is no room for anti-vaxxers to be anywhere near a school setting.

Q1074 Kate Osborne: What are you doing or what has been done around educating children of the benefits and possibly the cons of vaccination?

Nadhim Zahawi: Children and parents.

Kate Osborne: And parents, yes.

Nadhim Zahawi: Remember that you need parental consent. Susan, did you want to come in on that?

Susan Acland-Hood: Sorry, I was only going to come in on the question about the scale of the problem. I could not agree more with the Secretary of State when he says that any unreasonable anti-vax activity around a school is too much. The scale of this has, in fact, been quite small. We take it extremely seriously. I have a report that hits my desk every week on the number of incidents we have seen, and it is typically a handful, in single digits. In every case, we will work with the Home Office and the police. We have really good systems set up to make sure that we can bring police presence in.

One of the reflections I would make is that we are trying to strike the right balance by making sure that we respond extremely quickly and vigorously where it happens, but not playing into the hands of anti-vaxxers by suggesting that there is more of it than there is. This is very small numbers. Where it happens, we take it very seriously and act on it very quickly.

Q1075 Kate Osborne: Can I just pick you up on that? Out of 526 headteachers and principals in this particular survey, 79% had received emails from protesters threatening legal action for the administration of vaccines to children, 13% had reported seeing protesters immediately outside their schools, and 20% had reported protesters in the local area. That seems quite high to me and not a handful, as you have suggested.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Susan Acland-Hood: The first thing that I would say is that there are 24,000 schools in the country. I appreciate that this is likely to be more of a secondary issue, but you are talking about 4,000 settings. One of the things we have done is to work very closely with the teacher unions to say, "If there are things you do not think your members are reporting, tell us about them and we will make sure we will take action on them". Whenever they are reported to us, we act on them. If we think they are not being reported, we pull that through the teacher unions.

In terms of emails being sent with letters, we have sent comprehensive guidance to schools, making sure that they were really clear about what was and was not their responsibility and giving them suggestions on how to respond and how to manage some of those. It is important that we do not overstate this, because there is a risk that that plays into the hands of those who are making the case against. The vast majority of the schools rollout has gone well. The SAIS teams have been able to do their work uninterrupted. We are making sure that, around that, we take care of headteachers, teachers, pupils and parents as they go through that process, as well as we can.

Q1076 **Tom Hunt:** This is about the national funding formula. We know that, for levelling up, that is going to be key. Different, discrete projects like opportunity areas are important, but really looking at the core funding of our public services and how they are funded is crucial. There was a report recently by the Public Accounts Committee that found that the national funding formula made deprived schools fare worse. That was what I saw.

It does concern me. There is a multi-academy trust, for example, that operates in Suffolk and Tower Hamlets. I have heard for a long time that schools in Ipswich and Suffolk are not fairly funded and I have been looking to get some data. I was given data and was very concerned to see that young people with mild to moderate needs get four times more funding per head in Tower Hamlets than in Ipswich, 2.5 times more for moderate to significant, and two times more for significant to severe. I understand that, in London, there are going to be points about the cost of living et cetera. However, that is a big difference, and I just wanted to know if there are any plans to address that.

Nadhim Zahawi: Susan is itching to come in. All I would say is that I was in the Department when we moved towards the national funding formula, which, in my view, is a much better and fairer way of delivering funds to schools than the previous system.

Susan Acland-Hood: I did speak to the PAC about this at the time. The challenge here and the bit that is hard to get your head round is that the national funding formula replaces a system that was really difficult, frankly, to discern the logic behind. It also got stuck for quite a long time and did not move in response to change in levels of deprivation. That example that you give of Tower Hamlets and Ipswich is really helpful in understanding what is going on here.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Over time, Tower Hamlets has got a bit less deprived. It is still more deprived than Ipswich but not as much more deprived than Ipswich as it used to be, because, over time, Ipswich has got a bit more deprived and Tower Hamlets a bit less deprived. What the national funding formula did when it came in was reflect that change over time. The effect of that is that, as a result of the national funding formula, funding in places like Tower Hamlets is lower than it would have been without it.

What the PAC was highlighting was, "Tower Hamlets is really deprived and its funding has gone down; that does not seem entirely right", whereas funding in some places that look less deprived than Tower Hamlets now has gone up. What, in fact, the funding formula is doing is reflecting change over time in those places, where Tower Hamlets has been getting a bit less deprived and the funding has reflected that, and other places have been getting a bit more deprived. They may still be less deprived than Tower Hamlets but they are more deprived than they used to be, and so they need more funding than they used to have.

What they are describing is, in fact, a completely rational result of trying to make their funding match the deprivation better. I hope that that was roughly intelligible. I know it is complicated.

Q1077 Tom Hunt: It is very difficult. I am a social governor at a special school in Ipswich. I am very close to this. I spend a lot of time looking at the data. I was hearing a lot of vagaries and I was like, "Show me the data", and I just do not understand why a young person with learning disabilities in Ipswich should be getting less money per head than a young person—

Susan Acland-Hood: The NFF is getting us much closer to a position where the characteristics of the pupils in your school are perfectly reflected in the funding formula. That would include low prior attainment, disadvantage and an IDACI measure of local deprivation. As we do that, that gap that you are describing will close a little bit more. The funding units in Tower Hamlets are coming down a bit to reflect their change in deprivation. The overall funding amount is going up, because everybody's funding is going up, but the proportion is coming down.

Q1078 Dr Johnson: Thank you, Secretary of State and Susan. I wanted to ask you about the attainment gap that is opening up during covid. We have talked a lot—and Christian has asked lots of questions—about exams. We know that teachers have worked extremely hard to try to maintain good teaching, and parents and the Government have worked very hard to support them. Nevertheless, there have been gaps.

One of the areas that have faced great challenge that has not really been talked about are our youngest children, children between three and six, who are less able to work independently, whether they have a laptop or a computer, and whose parents may have been trying to do a full-time job from home at the same time and may not have been able to give them the attention that they needed to focus on that work.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

In my constituency and, I am sure, around the country, we have children who are entering year 2 at seven years old and unable to read basic words. Clearly, that is going to cause them significant difficulties as the gap appears and the curriculum gets more technically advanced. What are the Government doing to support this particular age group of children to ensure that those who cannot yet read and do numeracy to an identifiable standard are identified and receive support to catch up?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is an incredibly important question. As the Children and Families Minister previously, it is a subject dear to my heart. Some of the work is really well evidenced. The Nuffield early language intervention was very much part of supporting the education recovery. We have put £17 million into that and it is really well evidenced that it begins to deliver the language skills of reception-age children who need it most.

There are training and resources that are free of charge to schools that would particularly benefit in terms of the particular issue that you raise. Two-thirds of primary schools have signed up for it, so 11,000 of them, the majority being schools with the highest levels of disadvantage, as defined by the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. Something like 90,000 children have received that extra support.

One that is really close to me and many colleagues is maintained nurseries. I remember speaking to the APPG, and securing the funding over the whole of the SR period for maintained nurseries was incredibly important.

In terms of the early-years workforce, we are investing something like £20 million in high-quality, evidence-based professional development programmes for the workforce. There is a lot of work going into that. Then the big announcement in the Budget around what we are going to do in early years and family hubs is equally important, but that is to come.

Q1079 Dr Johnson: I welcome what you have to say, and in particular what you say about supporting disadvantaged children. Some of the young children who have suffered through the pandemic are children of working families. They have not been keyworkers, specifically trying to get their children into school, but they have equally had to work hard from home and try to juggle that. We have children who are not disadvantaged by free school meals, necessarily, but have been disadvantaged by an inability to access education or reduced access to education during the pandemic. I am thinking of examples in my constituency who, like I say, are going into year 2 unable to read properly.

Nadhim Zahawi: What is important—and I know it is equally important to Amanda Spielman—is looking not just at free school meals and disadvantage but at the attainment gap as well, which captures those children you are concerned about.

Q1080 Dr Johnson: The other thing we were told when your predecessor came



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to Committee was that the Government were doing annual attainment tests, or they were possibly called annual national standard tests. We were told that the results would be published for the Committee to see, once they were available, and I was wondering whether they are available and what they show about the youngest children.

Susan Acland-Hood: There are a few things. There are the standard attainment tests, which allow us to level the external exams. I am afraid I will have to write to you on the publication. I have a feeling it is November but I would not like to confirm that without double-checking and coming back.

Dr Johnson: It is November.

Susan Acland-Hood: I know it is, but only just. As soon as they are available, we will make sure that you can see them.

The other thing that we have are the Renaissance Learning surveys that we published last Friday. They are a sample but they look at children's progress during the pandemic. They show that primary-age children in reading, including disadvantaged children although not to the same extent as their peers, have caught up somewhat for the summer term. There is more challenge in primary maths and at secondary.

The other thing that we have done is to go to the phonics check, which is really important in making sure that children start reading well during those early years of primary school, because we know what a fantastically important foundation that is for the rest of their learning. Again, the purpose of the phonics check is precisely to help teachers target and support those children who look like they might have difficulty, and to make sure that they are getting to that point and able to access the rest of the curriculum.

There is a flipside on the point around the proportion of the National Tutoring Programme that has been targeted at those who get a pupil premium. We really wanted to give schools enough flexibility that they could respond to the patterns they are seeing in their students. If you have students who are falling behind but are not eligible for the pupil premium, it is very much still open to schools to use that National Tutoring Programme funding and support to make sure that they are putting the support with the children who need it most in order to help them make progress.

Nadhim Zahawi: Just to bring it to life for you in primary reading, in the spring term they were two months behind. In the summer term, they were 0.9 months behind, and so it is moving in the right direction. We had a long discussion earlier about the targeting of the recovery funding, which is very much evidenced by some of this research that we have published.

Q1081 **Apsana Begum:** Good morning to you both. Minister, to go back to when we discussed regional schools commissioners and regional



HOUSE OF COMMONS

disparities, are you satisfied with the work of regional schools commissioners? Some of the evidence that we have heard in previous sessions of this Committee in the last year has shown us a mixed picture, and many of us who are MPs on the Committee have not felt their presence across regions. Are you satisfied with their role and their efficiency?

Nadhim Zahawi: I have been in the job for only a few weeks. I am very happy to look at any evidence where you or colleagues think that regional schools commissioners have not been present or have not delivered. From what I have seen from my regional schools commissioners, the engagement and appetite for engagement is incredibly satisfactory, but I am very happy to look at any evidence. We want to get this right. They have worked incredibly hard, as the whole sector has.

If you think of what early years has had to do, being open from June of last year all the way through, it kept this country going. Back to Caroline's point about working parents and needing that support, teachers, school leaders and regional schools commissioners went above and beyond. If there is evidence that you think shows there are gaps, we will absolutely address them.

Q1082 **Apsana Begum:** My second question is for Susan. My colleague Tom earlier mentioned the pupil premium and allocations. You alluded to the fact that some areas are less deprived and moving in a positive direction, and that is good to hear. What indications and measurements of deprivation that the Department is using are showing areas of improvement?

Susan Acland-Hood: There are three main deprivation indicators or other indicators that play in the national funding formula. The first is free school meals. The second is IDACI, the area-based deprivation index, which goes down to quite a granular level. The third is low prior attainment, which I appreciate is not a pure disadvantage measure, but it correlates quite strongly. It also picks up some things that we might not otherwise see just through the disadvantage lens.

Apsana Begum: I am going to indulge you in terms of my constituency. I am one of the Tower Hamlets MPs.

Susan Acland-Hood: I think you might be my MP.

Q1083 **Apsana Begum:** Brilliant, so I just want to get a sense of what you think has changed. What indicators of deprivation have shown a difference in terms of the work that the DfE has done and committed to?

Susan Acland-Hood: In Tower Hamlets?

Q1084 **Apsana Begum:** Yes. I am just using Tower Hamlets as an example because I am one of the MPs, but just to get a sense of the areas where there has been work.

Chair: Be as concise as you can.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Susan Acland-Hood: There has been a shift in both FSM and IDACI, but I am happy to write to you on that in more detail.

Q1085 **Nicola Richards:** Secretary of State, when it comes to Holocaust education, the Holocaust Educational Trust's Lessons from Auschwitz Project, which is funded by your Department, is, I am sure you will agree, second to none in what it achieves. Part of its success is because it is focused on historical, site-based learning, which is essential for young people to fully understand the atrocities of the Holocaust. I regularly meet young people who took part in this project years ago—some who are not so young anymore. It just shows what a life-changing experience it really can be.

With antisemitism and Holocaust distortion on the rise, do you think that the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust is vital, and will you be committing to renewing the funding for the Lessons from Auschwitz Project, not just for this year but in future years to come?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is vital. We are committed to it. I have seen it first-hand, in my constituency and in my schools. It is incredible work. We always have to remember that we have to redouble our efforts for the next generations. I can share with you here, Chair, that my first international visit next week after my time at COP in Glasgow will be to Poland, to Auschwitz. It is incredibly important and we absolutely should be funding it properly.

Q1086 **Nicola Richards:** Thank you. My next question is on a different topic, which is home education. I wondered what the Department's plan is to introduce a statutory register for home-educated children, as recommended by our home education report. I did a bit of looking online at what the advice was in Sandwell, which is the local authority of my constituency in West Bromwich East.

If a child has to drop out from school, the headteacher should notify the local authority, but they say, "If your child has never been to school, you do not have to take any action before you start educating them at home, but if you could let us know, we can make sure your child's record is updated to prevent a school place being allocated". This is fairly floppy and non-committal in terms of that local authority, Sandwell, making sure that it knows which parents are going to be home educating their children right from the start.

Nadhim Zahawi: You raise an incredibly important point. I would say at the outset that I have seen excellent examples of home education. Again in my constituency, I have a brilliant family in one of my villages who really deliver outstanding home education. We need to make sure that, whatever policy formation we do, we remember that there are people doing this brilliant work.

We are absolutely committed to the register. We will set out further details on our response to the children not in school consultation, which we intend to publish by the end of the year. This is really important.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Without the register, we really cannot begin to think through how we look at, for example, persistent absenteeism, which I know is a subject that your Chair is very concerned about.

Q1087 Chair: While I very much welcome the response you gave to our Committee report, are you going to look at some kind of annual assessment? We suggested one in basic skills of maths and English at least annually and that it happens across the board, because it does not happen at the moment. Nicola has just cited what goes on in her constituency. You seem reluctant to do this. Given that kids in school are tested and have to do SATs and exams, why should there not be at least some basic assessment once a year of their maths and English?

Nadhim Zahawi: I think it was back in April 2019 that we published the revised, much strengthened guidance to local authorities and parents on current arrangements for oversight of elective home education. It really does set out what I hope are the clear terms and the steps that local authorities can take where they are not satisfied that the education provided by parents is suitable.

The guidance and communication, from what I have seen, reiterate what good practice looks like and make clear what the necessary processes are to get to that good practice. I know, for example—and Susan and I have discussed this—that support for the assessment of children through this period, when we did not have examinations because of Covid, was delivered for those parents who needed it.

Q1088 Chair: So there are no plans to toughen up the guidance on what the assessments should be.

Nadhim Zahawi: I am always open minded to look at what more needs to happen. You know my view on this, Chair. The first step is that you need the register, because you need to know where these children are at.

Chair: And the outcomes for these children, which we do not know.

Nadhim Zahawi: Which is why engagement in the teacher assessment was so important.

Q1089 Chair: The DfE says that many of these children are not getting an adequate education, so it is your own Department saying it. Surely, that is why an assessment, at least in basic maths and English, once a year, is not unreasonable for children who are being home educated.

Nadhim Zahawi: Before we get to the place where we begin to make those decisions, we need the register.

Chair: I think you can do both, but I get what you are saying.

Q1090 Dr Johnson: One thing about the home education report and the recommendation for a register was just how unanimous it was within our Committee and how well supported it was from both ends of the political spectrum. I am a bit unsure, when the Government have been so keen



HOUSE OF COMMONS

on the idea and in support of it, why it is taking so long. The Government have seen how rapidly they were able to support the provision of a new vaccine—you were Vaccines Minister—and rolled out an entire delivery service for vaccinating the entire population twice. You did that in a matter of months, Minister, so it seems strange that you have not managed to do this in a matter of minutes, really.

This is a serious point. This is a safeguarding issue. We know that there are some people who are delivering amazing-quality, fantastic home education to their children and doing a fantastic job. We also know that some people are not and, indeed, that some people use the fact that they can disappear to lead children into places that are not good. I am interested in a time commitment on how long it will take you, bearing in mind the great achievements you had with vaccines, to devise a register for these children.

Chair: Answer in a sentence, if you could.

Nadhim Zahawi: In a sentence, it was right to consult properly. That was really important. All of us are saying that there are some very good examples of parents who do this really well, and we do not want to do anything that would be detrimental to that. We have done that. We will work at pace, but there is a legislative timetable as well. I promise you one thing: this Secretary of State and this Perm Sec are absolutely focused on all the things we have talked about today and delivering them at pace.

Christian Wakeford: I have two very quick questions.

Chair: Could you ask them all together?

Q1091 **Christian Wakeford:** The first one is in terms of literacy. I declare another interest, being chair of the APPG on literacy. There are roughly 9 million people in the country who either struggle with reading or cannot read. When we are talking about levelling up in terms of health, employment, education and skills, what are we going to be doing to address this national scandal, if you will?

The second question is in regard to curriculum reform for PHSE. I speak to students as regularly as I can. The growing concern is that it is not fit for purpose and not relevant, and that they are not learning anything from it. What can we do to have a PHSE course that gets our children ready for adult life?

Nadhim Zahawi: I would say literacy and numeracy. Being an engineer by background, I would say we need both. The work of the National Literacy Trust in this area is incredibly important. One of the first things I did was to engage with them. They have over 82 large businesses now, not just engaging for PR purposes but thinking through real outcomes and products that would get us to where we need to be. The work we are doing on literacy and numeracy through the SR is incredibly important, and that is something that I have to deliver on.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

On numeracy, the Chancellor announced an investment of over £500 million in Multiply, which will make a huge difference, in my view. At 11 years old, I could not speak a word of English. When you pick up the language, read in the language and begin to think of the language, you get to become Secretary of State of Education in this country.

On PHSE, I was in the Department when we launched the consultation, which I think was really well delivered and landed well with school leaders, in primary for healthy relationships, and in secondary for sex and relationships. Susan and I have talked about this, but we always want to go back to how we can improve the system.

Susan Acland-Hood: The new RHSE curriculum was introduced only a tiny bit more than a year ago. The next thing is about really embedding that and making sure that we have excellent guidance. We renewed the guidance and put more money into it over the course of the last year.

Q1092 Chair: I will move on to a skills question about the construction workers deficit. I just want to understand what the plan is to increase public awareness of the availability of the lifetime skills guarantee for construction trades and other areas where there are deficits. How could you ensure that the lifetime skills guarantee programme works more closely with all training providers, such as FE colleges and the private sector, and employers, so that you have a proper, truly ready workforce? Apart from dealing with numeracy and literacy, that is surely one of the key areas. I think you were bursting to answer that, but am I wrong?

Nadhim Zahawi: I would just say a couple of sentences on it. One, we have to take some tactical interventions now, because the economy is coming out of the equivalent of World War Three. There are things like the Kickstart and Restart schemes, with £2 billion and £2.9 billion, and bootcamps. We are expanding those. They are 16-week, fat, deep courses that end in a job, which is great. That is tactical and addresses a short-term need in the economy.

The strategic aim is to continue the journey of apprenticeships that we began with the new standards and the apprenticeship levy, and to continue that delivery. We have the additional £170 million by 2024, which takes the investment in apprenticeships from £2.5 billion to £2.7 billion. There is also the journey on T-levels and level 2s. Once we have completed that, we will have a system that really is world class. It can have that stability that Germany and Switzerland have. I hope that, around the breakfast table, when the envelope with the T level results comes through, that moment where you punch the air is real delivery, which delivers to the needs of the economy.

Q1093 Chair: You have announced an incredible 42% increase in cash terms, which is, again, a remarkable amount of money for skills. Given that the taxpayer is funding all this, surely, strategically, you need to direct the funds at the areas where we have skills deficits, construction being one of them.



Nadhim Zahawi: You are absolutely right.

Susan Acland-Hood: There are two things. We want to get to the place where there is a much more organic—I am trying to find a word that is not “intercourse” to say in this Committee—conversation going on between employers and providers at a local level, which allows skills needs to be met much more quickly. There are some things where either we will have a strategic need that is so big or there is such a big shift that we need to say, “Nationally, this is a priority sector”. We have said that construction is a priority sector. We have a joint programme of work with BEIS and DWP, which is not just about the things that are in our control.

We have construction as a focus for the bootcamps. You are absolutely right in trying to make sure that we are encouraging people to think about that as they think about the level 3 guarantee, but we are also working with DWP, for example, to make sure that, when it is giving advice to people in jobcentres about next moves, it is steering them towards those some of those priority sectors.

Q1094 **Chair:** Are you working with companies that think they can help in this?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is exactly right. If you look at where the skills shortages are, we are focusing on those sectors, construction being one of them. Then you look at where you have relative advantage in economic terms, such as creative industries, financial services, digital or the chemicals sector. In the chemicals sector, we have half a dozen companies that are truly global, such as Ineos, Synthomer and Croda. They want to do more on apprenticeships. The nuclear sector is a big opportunity. Offshore wind is a huge opportunity. It is about sector, skills and place.

Q1095 **Chair:** Very finally, you will be pleased to know, we did this report, as you know, and you said you accept most of the recommendations around white, working-class disadvantage, where they underperform compared to most other ethnic groups. If I could just ask you two questions together, we looked at making better use of the pupil premium and targeting it to focus more intently on pupils living in persistent poverty, as well as ringfencing part of the pupil premium to make sure that it is being spent on the most disadvantaged, because some surveys suggest that schools are using it to fix leaky roofs or whatever it might be. Could I just take your view on that?

We also recommended that you look at the EBacc, because there is a significant decline in design and technology of, I think, 57%, which is a huge amount over the past few years, and a significant decline in computer science. These are all subjects that we need for a world in which we are entering the fourth industrial revolution. Will you look at the EBacc? While geography and history are important, so are design and technology and computer science. Surely they should be in the EBacc, or people should be given an option to do them as part of the EBacc.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nadhim Zahawi: Let me pick up the first point. In terms of the pupil premium, we will be reviewing a sample of schools' published templates during this academic year to assess the impact of our reforms. It will enable us to consider how we do that future policy development, particularly on how we can drive better value.

Chair: You will review the pupil premium and how it is working.

Nadhim Zahawi: I have just committed to that. We have been talking about the national funding formula and how it is a better way of targeting money at the most disadvantaged, including white, working-class boys. I know that, from my time in the Department before, when I was Children and Families Minister, there is a large cohort of white, working-class boys for whom, if you can make a difference, you will move the dial in terms of opportunity in this country. That is not to say that there are no other disadvantaged communities of other ethnicities where we see equally big challenges that we will also focus on.

On the EBacc, I am happy to take that away and have a look at it.

Q1096 **Chair:** I do not know if you wanted to comment on the EBacc. There must be some worry in the Department about the decline in design and technology and computer science.

Susan Acland-Hood: On computer science in particular, we made a change to the curriculum to move from IT to computer science, which caused a dip, because computer science was a different subject and, frankly, was more demanding and more rigorous. Since then, the numbers have been going up. You have to look at the time period and what it relates to, but, yes, we would always want to keep those things under review and to test them.

The key thing about the EBacc, though, is that it was a way of trying to make known one of the pieces of secret knowledge that the middle class holds but does not share about the subjects that are likely to give you significant success in later life. There was something incredibly important about trying to crack that open and say, "These are some of the subjects that, if you do them, will give you the broad base that allows you to"—

Chair: Learning design and technology also gives you success in later life, as much as geography or history. I am not saying one or the other, but I just find it strange that it is not part of it.

Susan Acland-Hood: I think we should keep it under review but we need to remember what it is there for as well.

Chair: Can I thank you, first of all, Nadhim, for all the extra funds you have got for the Department for Education in the space of a few weeks, which is very welcome?

Nadhim Zahawi: I have to tell you: I am an impostor, because the credit goes to my brilliant team. I just want to put that on record. They know who they are. They did a phenomenal job.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: I was just about to say thank you to you, Permanent Secretary, and for all the work that all your staff do under very difficult circumstances, because of the pandemic.

Susan Acland-Hood: Thank you very much. I am very proud of my Department.

Chair: It is appreciated. Thank you also for your work as Vaccines Minister.