



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

15th September 2020



I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak during August.

School and college transport

On 8 August, I announced £40 million of funding for dedicated school and college transport to create more capacity where it is needed most, and to support the national priority for all children and young people to return to full-time education in the autumn term.

Local transport authorities will be allocated the funding in a way that reflects the number of children and young people in the local area and how far they have to travel. This includes students travelling to education or training, as well as anyone supervising or escorting students to education provision. Local authorities should work with providers and set out their travel arrangements and consider that students in further education often rely more on public transport and travel further to get there.

In addition to this funding, the government is investing £2 billion to increase active travel and I am encouraging students and staff who have the option to walk, cycle or use a scooter, to do so and a new campaign was launched in August by the Department for Transport to reduce demand on public transport at peak times and minimise overcrowding.

In further support of this priority, the Secretary of State for Transport announced further funding for the bus and light rail sectors to help increase services ahead of expected increase in public transport use in September.

Detailed guidance for local authorities on the on managing the capacity of, and demand for, public and dedicated transport, to ensure that children can travel to school or college safely, has been developed with the sector and Public Health England and can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020>

Communications campaign

On 17 August, I launched the #backtoschoolsafely campaign to reassure parents and students that schools and colleges are ready for their return in September. This forms part of the government's wider Stay Alert campaign and includes press, digital, radio and billboard adverts alongside working with influencers. The campaign will target BAME parents and those from a lower socio-economic background, where insight tells us that concerns are highest, using community publications and news channels in different languages as well as translated guidance and leaflets. Alongside the campaign, wider engagement with the teaching profession, school leaders and local authority communications will support them to reassure parents and students in returning to school.

Home testing kits

In July I set out a commitment that, by the autumn, all schools and further education (FE) providers will be provided with a small number of home testing kits to complement the main access to testing routes. On 26 August, the Department confirmed that all schools and FE providers will receive an initial supply of 10 home testing kits to be offered in the exceptional circumstance where an individual may have barriers to accessing testing elsewhere.

Schools and colleges will not be expected to administer testing. Full instructions on how to administer the test and what to do next are provided within each kit. The full guidance on the initial supply of coronavirus (COVID-19) home testing kits can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-home-test-kits-for-schools-and-fe-providers>.

Personal protect equipment (PPE)

On 26 August, deliveries began to provide schools and further education institutions with a small amount of PPE. This one-off distribution of PPE will contain clinical face masks, aprons, gloves and visors, as well as the hand sanitiser needed to put on and take off PPE. The PPE is being provided free of charge by the Department of Health and Social Care to help build resilience across the education sector to respond to any suspected cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) arising in schools and colleges.

As set out in our guidance on safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings, PPE is only needed if a child, young person or other learner becomes ill with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms in school or college, and only then if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained. Full guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings-including-the-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

Face coverings

From 1 September, in line with changes to World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance, schools and colleges in England will have the discretion to require staff and pupils from years 7 and above to use face coverings in communal areas where social distancing cannot be safely managed, if they believe that it is right in their particular circumstances. On the basis of current evidence, in light of the mitigating measures education settings are taking, and the negative impact on communication, face coverings will not generally be necessary in the classroom even where social distancing is not possible.

Consistent with the WHO's new advice, where children and young people in year 7 and above are educated in areas where transmission of the virus is high, defined as areas of national government intervention, we are advising schools and colleges that face coverings should be worn by adults and pupils when moving around communal areas. As in the general approach, it will not usually be necessary to wear face coverings in the classroom, where protective measures already mean the risks are lower, and they may inhibit teaching and learning.

No-one should be excluded from education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering. The same exemptions to face coverings will apply in schools and colleges, and we would expect teachers and other staff to be sensitive to those needs. The full guidance on face coverings in education can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>

Local lockdowns

My primary focus remains supporting all schools to welcome back all pupils for the start of term, however, it is important that both government and schools prepare for the possibility of local restrictions. The full guidance on local lockdown and the actions required, including tiers of national restriction for education and childcare, can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/containing-and-managing-local-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreaks>

All schools, colleges and other education settings are opening for the start of autumn term, with all those in areas subject to local restrictions currently at Tier 1 – fully open to all pupils full time, with face coverings required in corridors and communal areas for pupils in Year 7 and above. Local authority leaders and directors of public health, alongside national government, will be at the centre of any decision making to move out of Tier 1 for education settings, taking all other possible measures, including implementing restrictions on other sectors, before considering restricting attendance in education.

If all other measures have been exhausted, Tier 2 would require secondary schools and colleges in a restricted area to use rotas to help break chains of transmission of coronavirus, while primary schools would remain open to all pupils. Tiers 3 and 4 introduce remote learning full time for groups of pupils, with vulnerable children and children of critical workers continuing to attend. Guidance on how schools can plan for Tier 2 restrictions is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-schools-can-plan-for-tier-2-local-restrictions>

Qualifications

On 17 August I announced that students in England will receive teacher assessed grades for GCSE, AS and A level results this summer. Students who received a calculated grade higher than their centre assessment grade did not see their grade reduced. This was deemed to be the fairest approach to avoid some students receiving grades that did not reflect their prior performance.

Revised AS and A level grades went to schools and colleges on 19 August, replacing the calculated grades that were issued on 13 August. The GCSE results that students received on 20 August were final – that is, they were based on the higher of the centre assessment grade or calculated grades.

Results for many vocational and technical qualifications used for progression to further or higher education have been available on the same days as A level and GCSE results. However, some results have been delayed and are being issued as quickly as possible. Students who are taking such qualifications should check the planned results day with their school or college.

The Exam Results Helpline will remain available from 12 to 28 August to provide students and their parents with direct access to experienced careers advisers as they receive their exam results. Callers to the helpline who can advise on the different options available to them including T levels, A levels, GCSEs, BTECs, apprenticeships and other vocational options. Support will also be available on topics such as clearing, university, gap years and the autumn exam series.

This decision has resulted in grade inflation, so we will be removing the temporary student number controls which had been introduced for the upcoming academic year. We are working with the higher education sector to increase capacity so that universities are able to honour offers to students who meet their conditions this coming year wherever possible. Where maximum capacity is reached, we are working towards an offer of an alternative course or a deferred place at the same university. To support this commitment, we have lifted the cap on domestic medicine and dentistry places. We will also provide additional teaching grant funding to ensure that providers are able to increase capacity for high-cost subjects.

Autumn exams

In most cases, students will be able to use the grades they have received this summer to move onto their next step. However, we recognise that some students may be unhappy with their summer grade, may need an improved result to move onto the next stage of their education, or may not have had enough evidence for a grade to be awarded in the summer.

To support these students, we are running an additional series of exams in the autumn. AS and A level exams will take place in October and GCSE exams in November, and will be available in all GCSE, AS and A level subjects. Results will be based on students' performance in exams alone and not on any non-exam assessment, with the exception of art and design qualifications.

Students wishing to enter for autumn exams should do so via the school or college where they were due to sit their exams in the summer. The exception is students who did not achieve a grade 4 or above in English language or maths GCSE. These students will take those exams at their post September institution. The deadlines for entering are 4 September for A and AS levels, and 18 September for GCSEs (except English and maths, for which the deadline is 4 October).

Any student wanting to understand the implications for university admission of taking these autumn exams should speak to the university from which they have an offer.

We have launched the [Exam Support Service](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series) which will help schools and colleges to book sites and invigilators where required. Schools and colleges will also be able to claim funding through the service if their autumn fees exceed any fee savings that awarding organisations are returning to them, following cancellation of summer exams. Further information on the support available can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series>.

FE capital funding

A further £200 million has been provided to 180 colleges to begin immediate work from this September to repair and refurbish buildings and campuses. This initial investment is being fast-tracked so colleges can kick-start work this year and so students and staff will benefit at least a year earlier than originally planned. The funding marks the latest step in the government's drive to overhaul further education and deliver the skilled workforce employers and the economy need, levelling up skills and opportunities for more people across the country.

We have allocated the funding on the same basis as revenue funding for further education, through the 16 to 19 revenue funding (core programme funding) and through adult education and apprenticeship funding. We have made adjustments to ensure further education colleges in devolved Adult Education Budget areas are treated in the same way as colleges in non-devolved areas and receive their full allocation. A full list of the final funding amounts is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/capital-allocations-for-fe-colleges-and-designated-institutions>

Free schools

Last week we confirmed that more than 50 new free schools will open on schedule in September. These new schools will create more than 24,000 high-quality places across the country, once at full capacity, providing parents with a greater choice of schools and levelling up opportunity across the country.

The new schools include innovative maths and science schools, which deliver qualifications young people and the economy need. For instance, the University of Liverpool Maths School will provide talented young mathematicians in the region with an opportunity to take their mathematical talents to the next level, regardless of their background. Also opening, is the School of Science and Technology in Maidstone which is a state-of-the-art new secondary school partnering the School of Science and Technology in Singapore and specialising in STEAM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics).

We want every child in this country, whatever their background, to have access to a good school place. Of the 52 new schools opening, 15 are special schools and one is an Alternative Provision school, creating over 1,000 new places at capacity for young people with complex special educational needs.

With these new schools opening in September, there will be over 550 free schools open across the country, with more than 220 approved to open in the future.

Other key updates

In addition to the above, please see below some recent key updates from the Department.

On 28 August 2020, I issued the fifth notice, relevant to all schools, modifying section 3 of the Education Act 1996 in the context of pupil registration (section 434 of the Education Act 1996) with the same effect as previous notices. The new notice applies from 1 September to 30 September 2020 following the expiry on the fourth notice on 31 August 2020. Full details can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modification-notice-school-registration-legislation-changes>

On 28 August 2020, I issued the fifth notice about changes to state-funded school inspections requirements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which will apply from 1 September to 30 September 2020 following the expiry of the fourth notice on 31 August 2020. This notice has been issued with the same effect as the previous notices and is relevant to Ofsted, state-funded schools, local authorities, and academy trusts. Full details can be accessed at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disapplication-notice-school-inspections-legislation-changes>

The Department has updated guidance on devices:

- i. for local authorities, academy trusts and schools and the support available to provide remote education and access to children's social care which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-with-technology-for-remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>; and
- ii. on how schools can access digital devices for children requiring access to remote education due to shielding or local coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-laptops-and-tablets-for-children-who-cannot-attend-school-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19>; and
- iii. for local authorities, academy trusts and schools on managing Department for Education (DfE) devices provided for children, families and young adults most in need which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/laptops-tablets-and-4g-wireless-routers-provided-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department has updated guidance for schools and local authorities on school meal arrangements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, details can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

The Department has updated the advice for local authorities and their partners to help support and protect vulnerable children. The latest advice can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services>

The Department has published the outcomes from the consultation on changes to the adoption and children regulations: coronavirus (COVID-19). 189 responses were submitted to the consultation and on the basis of responses, the government will allow the majority of temporary flexibilities to lapse on 25 September and extend a small number of flexibilities for use to March 2021, full details of the consultation response can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-adoption-and-children-regulations-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Department has set up the Barnardo's 'See Hear Respond' service which is provided across England by Barnardo's and other national and local community-based organisations in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The programme has been created to help children and young people in England who are experiencing harm and increased adversity during this period by providing support to those who are not being seen by social care or other key agencies.

The Department has updated our advice on what all schools will need to do during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak from the start of the autumn term. The updated advice can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

The Department has updated guidance on protective measures for holiday and after-school clubs, and other out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to set out a change to the protective measures which will be effective from the point at which all pupils return to school in the autumn, making clear the position on group sizes and how providers can minimise the risk of children mixing outside their school bubbles. The full guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>.

The Department has updated guidance for FE colleges and providers on actions during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to set out what they need to know for the

autumn term so that students of all ages can benefit from their education and training in full, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision>

The Department has updated guidance for schools on day-to-day running of schools and this can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

The guidance for children with a health and care needs plan has also been updated and can be found in full here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-law-on-education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-due-to-coronavirus/education-health-and-care-needs-assessments-and-plans-guidance-on-temporary-legislative-changes-relating-to-coronavirus-covid-19>.

The Department has published details of additional funding for local authorities as part of the Wellbeing for Education Return project to support to state-funded schools and colleges. Mental health and wellbeing will be a concern as pupils and students return to full-time education this autumn and local authorities may choose how to spend the money in order to best meet local need. Further details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wellbeing-for-education-return-grant-s31-grant-determination-letter>

Ofsted have published guidance on the interim visits to registered early years providers from September. The visits are part of a phased return to routine inspection and will ensure that standards are being maintained and that safe and effective childcare is available for all who need it. These visits will not result in an inspection grade, though inspectors will still be able to use regulatory or enforcement powers if appropriate. The guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-visits-registered-early-years-providers>

The Department has updated guidance on school attendance advising how schools can use pupil registers and attendance codes, including in circumstances due to Coronavirus (COVID-19), and set school hours and term dates. The latest version can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-attendance>

The Department has updated the 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): reducing burdens on educational and care settings' guidance which sets out the data collections, services or requests which will be cancelled, paused or will continue. The updated guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-reducing-burdens-on-educational-and-care-settings>

Ofqual have published a guide to appeals and malpractice or maladministration complaints for those receiving qualifications in England this summer and updated the

guidance for students receiving GCSEs, AS and A levels. The guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/student-guide-to-appeals-and-malpractice-or-maladministration-complaints-summer-2020> and here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/your-results-what-next>.

Ofqual have published a guide for employers about qualification results in England this summer which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-guide-to-results-for-regulated-qualifications-summer-2020>

Ofqual have published appeal arrangements for GCSE, AS and A level grading in summer 2020 which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/appeal-arrangements-for-as-a-levels-and-gcse>

Ofqual published the consultation decisions for the proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021. The full outcome can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-the-assessment-of-gcse-as-and-a-levels-in-2021>

Ofqual have updated guidance for awarding organisation appeals and complaints links relating to vocational and technical qualifications in England. The updated guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-organisation-appeals-and-complaints-links>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has published information for public sectors employers wanting to provide additional relief to their post-16 training providers during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relief-scheme-for-providers-of-apprenticeship-training-to-public-sector-employers>

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a large circular flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education