



**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
Secretary of State

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I would like to update you on the Department for Education's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak between 22 September and 29 September.

### **Skills and post-18 education**

As you know, I strongly believe by driving up the skills base of a community we drive up what it will achieve. It is central to our mission of levelling up the nation and is vital if we want our country to grow economically and our productivity to improve.

On 29 September, the Prime Minister announced plans to transform the training and skills system, making it fit for the 21st century economy, and helping the country build back better from coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Adults without an A-Level or equivalent qualification will be offered a free, fully-funded college course – providing them with skills valued by employers, and the opportunity to study at a time and location that suits them. This offer will be available from April 2021 in England and will be paid for through the National Skills Fund. A full list of available courses will be set out shortly.

Higher education loans will also be made more flexible, allowing adults and young people to space out their study across their lifetimes, take more high-quality vocational courses in further education colleges and universities, and to support people to retrain for jobs of the future.

These reforms will be backed by continued investment in college buildings and facilities – including over £1.5 billion in capital funding. More details will be set out in

a further education white paper later this year.

Apprenticeship opportunities will also be increased, with more funding for SMEs taking on apprentices, and greater flexibility in how their training is structured – especially in sectors such as construction and creative industries where there are more varied employment patterns.

The government is also committing £8 million for digital skills boot camps, expanding successful pilots in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands and introducing programmes in four new locations. From next year, boot camps will be extended to sectors like construction and engineering, helping the country build back better and support our refreshed Industrial Strategy.

Earlier this year the government launched its free online Skills Toolkit, helping people train in digital and numeracy skills. This is being expanded today to include 62 additional courses.

£2.5 billion is also being made available through the National Skills Fund to help get people working again after COVID, as well as giving those in work the chance to train for higher-skilled, better-paid jobs.

### **Use of the NHS COVID-19 app in schools and further education colleges**

On 24 September, NHS Test and Trace launched the NHS COVID-19 app to help control the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The app will be available to download for anyone aged 16 and over which means that some students in year 11, students in years 12, 13 and in further education colleges will be eligible to use the app and benefit from its features. The introduction guide for the app can be found here: <https://covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/introducing-the-app.pdf>

The Department for Education and the Department for Health and Social Care have jointly published guidance on the use of the NHS COVID-19 app in schools and further education colleges. This guidance provides information on how the app works and sets out actions required to use it within schools and further education colleges in England. In addition, to further support use of the app in schools and further education colleges, NHS Test and Trace have produced a fact sheet for parents and a poster about storing phones in lockers. The full guidance, fact sheet and poster can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-the-nhs-covid-19-app-in-schools-and-further-education-colleges>, <https://www.covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/pause-function-poster.pdf> and <https://www.covid19.nhs.uk/pdf/parents-carers-over16s-factsheet.pdf>

## **Supporting schools to share good practice**

The Department is offering several school-led webinars on remote education to help share good practice. This is to support schools that are looking for help to improve the quality of their remote provision in line with the expectations set out in the guidance for full opening. The guidance on how to access school-led webinars on remote education is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remote-education-webinars>

The latest information, guidance and support for teachers and leaders on educating children during the coronavirus outbreak can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remote-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

## **Other key updates**

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

On 28 September, I wrote to Amanda Spielman, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to formally request Ofsted inspect level 6 and 7 apprenticeship training provision from 1 April 2021 as recommended in the Augar Review. The full letter can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gavin-williamson-education-secretary-letter-to-her-majestys-chief-inspector>

The Department has published week 39 attendance data for education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which can be found here: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/attendance-in-education-and-early-years-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/2020-week-39>

The Department has updated guidance on critical workers who can access schools or educational settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to reflect that as all pupils return full-time to schools and educational settings from the start of the autumn term there may be exceptional circumstances in which some level of restriction to education or childcare is required in a local area. The updates guidance can be found here:

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

The Department has updated the guidance Coronavirus (COVID-19): school and college performance measures which outlines the Departments approach to school and college accountability, performance tables and data during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. The updated guidance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-and-college-performance-measures>

The Department has updated the guidance for schools and local authorities on school meals arrangements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. This latest update includes further information on free school meal eligibility, support for pupils eligible for free school meals who have to stay at home due to coronavirus (COVID-19) and on universal infant free school meals, updates on school food contracts, and guidance on providing water in school. The full guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

The Department has updated guidance for parents and carers of children attending out of school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to provide further advice on live performances and the use of face coverings. The full guidance can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-of-children-attending-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

The Department has updated the guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) for local authorities and their partners to help support and protect vulnerable children which can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services>

The Department has updated details on the package of support for students who have to defer their studies which includes a range of opportunities to gain new skills, undertake work placements, additional learning and career development support. The updated policy paper is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/package-of-support-for-students-who-have-to-defer-their-studies>

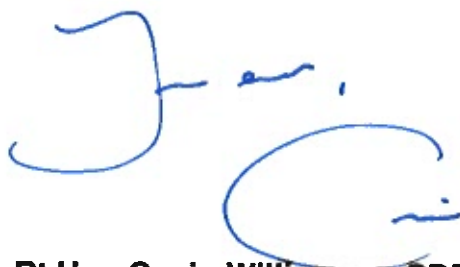
The Department has published information to help school leaders plan, develop and implement the new statutory relationships, sex and health curriculum which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-your-relationships-sex-and-health-curriculum>

The Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) has published the coronavirus (COVID-19) catch-up premium provisional allocation tables and conditions of grant for the academic year 2020 to 2021. The universal catch-up premium funding is available for all state-funded mainstream and special schools, and alternative provision. Published details include provisional allocations for academic year 2020 to 2021, details of the first payment of the 3 tranches and conditions of grant for local authorities. which can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-catch-up>

premium-provisional-allocations

Ofsted have published operational notes for Her Majesty's Inspectors carrying out interim visits and new provider monitoring visits to further education and skills providers, and state-funded schools from 28 September 2020. The notes can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-phase-further-education-and-skills-providers> and here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/interim-phase-maintained-schools-and-academies>

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin', written in a cursive style.

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
**Secretary of State for Education**

