



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 11 and 18 May 2021.

Variant of Concern-APR21-02 (B.1.617.2)

There are now multiple fast-growing clusters of the B.1.617.2 variant, first identified in India, in the UK. The epidemiology varies between local areas, but there are significantly higher levels of COVID-19 in Bolton, Sefton, Blackburn with Darwen and Lancashire.

The Department's contingency framework is a set of guiding principles designed to help decision makers when they are considering plans to apply, tighten or relax restrictions to education and childcare.

The framework includes measures that will be helpful tools in managing local outbreaks and responding to variants of concern (VoCs). These may include introducing further testing and re-introducing face coverings in education settings.

In managing local outbreaks and responding to variants of concern Bolton, Sefton and Blackburn, Directors of Public Health (DPHs) are offering surge testing to everyone aged 16+ and the reintroduction of face coverings for pupils, students or staff for a temporary period. Bolton and Blackburn with Darwen have also been given additional vaccine supply so that all those in the eligible age cohorts can get vaccinated.

Any restrictions on education would only be as a last resort and may only be initiated following a ministerial decision.

Every school with Reception class offered early language training

Every state school with a Reception class in England can now apply for training and resources through an early years catch-up programme funded by the Government, to support thousands more pupils with vital communication skills.

Delivered by the Nuffield Foundation and backed by an extra £8 million of investment, a recruitment campaign has launched for the second wave of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI). A programme proven to be effective in raising outcomes in Reception-age children's early language, communication and speech skills – particularly those who need the most support to overcome the disruption of the pandemic.

Universities to comply with free speech duties or face sanctions

A historic bill was introduced in Parliament on 12 May to strengthen the legal duties on higher education providers in England to protect freedom of speech on campuses up and down the country, for students, academics and visiting speakers.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will bring in new measures that will require universities and colleges registered with the Office for Students to defend free speech and help stamp out unlawful 'silencing'.

Skills and Post-16 Education Bill

New laws will deliver on the Prime Minister's Lifetime Skills Guarantee and will create a post-16 and adult education and training system that is fit for the future, providing the skills that people need for well-paid jobs and opportunities to train throughout their lifetime.

The government will introduce the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill on 18 May to deliver the Prime Minister's vision. The Bill forms the legislative underpinning for the bold reforms set out in the Skills White Paper.

Update on the rollout of devices

The government is providing over 1.3 million laptops and tablets to help schools, colleges and other FE institutions throughout the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The scale of deliveries was increased following the announcement on 5 January 2021 about a national lockdown and restricting attendance in schools and colleges but has since decreased following the return to schools on 8 March.

On 11 May we published the latest figure of 1,313,449 devices having been delivered since the start of the scheme.

We are reducing the frequency of the publication of the device statistics from weekly to monthly now that pupils have returned to school. The monthly publication means we are still reporting on progress in delivering services to schools, colleges and other FE institutions. The latest full data on laptops and tablets is available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/laptops-and-tablets-data>

Attendance

The Department's analysis from week 20 data indicates that 91.9% of pupils were in school on Wednesday 12th May with 99.9% of state funded schools open. Data for attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak for week 20 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>

Other key updates

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

The Department has published data measuring the net present value of further education in England 2018 to 2019. The data can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/measuring-the-net-present-value-of-further-education-in-england-2018-to-2019>

The Department has published national statistics on the number of children and young people with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or education, health and care (EHC) plan in England. The statistics can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-health-and-care-plans-england-2021>

The Department has published a case study on Whites Meadow Primary School. White Meadows has used flexible working to recruit and keep high-calibre staff, supporting their path from special measures to a good Ofsted rating. The case study can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/whites-meadow-primary-school>

The Department has published a case study about the school's group, United Learning. United Learning has taken a trust-wide approach to designing and delivering innovative flexible working solutions. The case study can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/united-learning>

The Department has updated its guidance on for FE providers on work-based learners and the Prevent statutory duty. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-based-learners-and-the-prevent-statutory-duty>

The Department has updated its guidance on providing apprenticeships during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response>

The Department has updated its research and analysis on special educational needs. The analysis provides links to data sources on children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) or a disability in England. The research can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sen-analysis-and-summary-of-data-sources>

The Department has updated its information giving the details of the successful applications for free schools and university technical colleges (UTCs) in the pre-opening stage. The data can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-schools-successful-applications>

The Department has updated its guidance on behaviour hubs to show how this programme will enable schools with exemplary behaviour to work with other schools to improve their behaviour culture. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/behaviour-hubs>

The Department has updated its transparency data on the lists of local authorities seeking academy and free school proposers, and of all academies and free schools already set up. The data can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-school-proposals>

The Department has updated its guidance on for schools, colleges and exam centres on who should enter students for exams, the health arrangements for exams and the support DfE is providing. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/responsibility-for-autumn-gcse-as-and-a-level-exam-series>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has published guidance on applying to the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP). This route is for organisations that are delivering, or planning to deliver, apprenticeship services critical to COVID-19. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-to-the-register-of-apprenticeship-training-providers-roatp>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has published guidance on the adult education budget, the funding rates and formula 2021 to 2022. **The guidance**

can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-education-budget-aeb-funding-rates-and-formula-2021-to-2022>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has updated its guidance explaining the changes to external quality assurance for end-point assessment organisations. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/changes-to-external-quality-assurance-for-end-point-assessment-organisations>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has updated its guidance for organisations who want to offer independent end-point assessment for apprenticeship standard. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-you-need-to-know-before-applying-to-be-an-apprentice-end-point-assessment-organisation>

The Education and Skills Funding Agency has updated its guidance and information for employers looking for an independent end-point assessment organisation and potential applicants to register as apprentice assessment organisations. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/register-of-end-point-assessment-organisations>

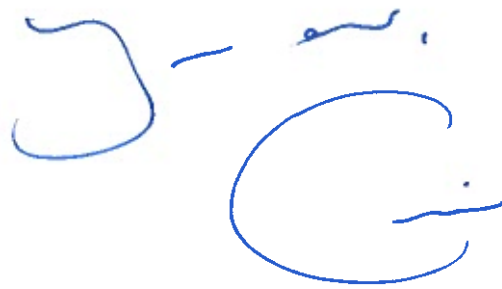
The Education and Skills Funding Agency has updated its guidance on advanced learner loans. The guidance provides templates for colleges and training organisations to use to provide data information to prospective learners. The guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/24-advanced-learning-loans-funding-information-letter-templates>

Ofqual has published an open consultation on the arrangements for non-exam assessment for qualifications in 2022. The consultation can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/arrangements-for-non-exam-assessment-for-qualifications-in-2022>

Ofqual has published the consultation outcome for arrangements for an autumn 2021 exam series. The outcome can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-arrangements-for-an-autumn-2021-exam-series>

Ofsted has published a review of research into factors that influence the quality of religious education (RE) in schools in England. The review can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-religious-education>

I hope you find this information useful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a large, stylized 'G' and a horizontal line extending from the top of the 'W'.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education