



HOUSE OF LORDS

COVID-19 Committee

House of Lords
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The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education

Dear Gavin,

Digital equipment and skills for teachers

The COVID-19 Committee recently undertook a wide-ranging inquiry into how the pandemic has accelerated the use of, and reliance on, digital technology, and the implications this may have for our individual, and broader societal, wellbeing in the long term.

The impact that the switch to remote learning had, and will continue to have, on pupils was, unsurprisingly, raised by a number of our witnesses. The number of pupils without adequate equipment, broadband, skills or adequate personal working space at home to participate in online lessons has been frequently raised in Parliament and in the media and we look forward to receiving the Government's comments on this as part of their response to our report. Given that many schools already expect a certain element of homework to be done online, and that it is plausible that future pandemics or other events might require a switch to home learning in future, we look forward to hearing what steps the Government are taking to improve pupils' ability to learn remotely, including through additional lessons and the provision of new local learning hubs with excellent broadband, and may write to you further on these matters once we have received the response to our report.

Additionally, however, we heard during our inquiry that teachers often lacked the skills and equipment to operate digitally. This is not a problem that will go away now that pupils have returned to the classroom. It is clear to us that all schools need to be equipped to deliver lessons remotely: to 'future-proof' against future pandemics and to benefit those pupils who, for whatever reason, cannot be in school in person. The pandemic has also raised people's awareness of the benefits that can come from an increased element of online learning: the ability for a particularly expert or inspiring teacher to be streamed into classrooms all over the country, for example, or for education to be more easily accessible to some disabled children. Pupils in school today need to be prepared for increasingly digital workplaces, and so teachers need to be equipped to prepare them for this. As one of our witnesses said: "you cannot be a teacher unless you are a digital teacher."

With that in mind, we would be grateful if you could respond and let us know how your department is monitoring whether all teachers have both the equipment and skills necessary

to be that “digital teacher”. In particular, we would appreciate answers to the following questions.

1. What assessment have you made of the number of:
 - a) teachers without access to a suitable device, and internet connection, to deliver education digitally in their classroom?
 - b) teachers without access to a suitable device, and internet connection, to deliver education digitally from their home?
 - c) teachers without adequate skills to deliver education digitally?
2. What plans do you have to ensure all teachers have adequate digital equipment and skills, to enable them to educate effectively in today’s digital world?
3. What plans do you have to review teacher training courses to reflect greater use of digital learning?

We look forward to receiving your reply.

Baroness Martha Lane-Fox of Soho CBE
Chair of the COVID-19 Select Committee