



**Permanent Secretary**

Robert Halfon MP  
Chair, Education Select Committee  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
SW1A 0AA

27<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Dear Robert,

I am writing to you on two issues, as agreed at the Education Select Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021: first, the committee was interested in our departmental apprenticeship programme; and, second, the committee asked whether the department holds data, or research, on students who took national curriculum assessments at the end of key stage 2, and their comparable results at age 16 and 18 in the independent and state school sectors. Responses to both of these points are detailed below.

### **Apprenticeships in the Department for Education**

I am proud of the department's work on apprenticeships – both as an employer, and as the department responsible for the apprenticeship programme more broadly. As part of the Government's Plan for Jobs, we introduced incentive payments for employers taking on apprentices as new recruits between 1 August 2020 and 31 January 2022. Over 101,000 incentive payments have been claimed by employers so far, and 76% of these claims have been for young apprentices under the age of 25 (at 29 September).

We are responding to employer feedback by making apprenticeships more flexible and making it easier for levy-payers to transfer funds. In August we launched a £7 million fund to support more apprentices through the flexi job apprenticeship scheme. In September we launched a new online service to simplify the transfers process. Now, levy paying employers can advertise their funding pledges, enabling a much wider range of businesses, including SMEs, to browse and apply for available funds. We are also working to encourage greater use of innovative apprenticeship training models, such as the 'front-loading' of off-the-job training and accelerated apprenticeships.

This package of improvements will support employers to develop the skills they need and provide high-quality apprenticeship opportunities across the country for people of all ages and backgrounds.

The DfE has a strong internal apprenticeship programme – we have exceeded our public sector target for apprenticeship starts in each of the last four financial years and are on track to do so again in 2021/22. We currently have over 350 apprentices on

standards from Level 2 to Level 7, and they cover both professional specialisms and essential underpinning skills.

Senior leaders are strongly committed to the vitality of the apprenticeship programme. For example, following a successful pilot last year, we put in place a new policy for external recruitment at our EA and EO grades in February 2021 – externally advertised vacancies at these grades are now recruited as apprentices by default, with a small number of exceptions. We have also advertised a number of apprenticeships at the junior and middle management grades (HEO/SEO), through which we have been able to take candidates who are looking for opportunities for career progression.

We recognise that apprentices having a rewarding experience is critical to achieving our aims for the programme. We have put in place partnerships with providers who can deliver high quality training. In addition to the workforce benefits of having more engaged staff<sup>1</sup>, there are broader skills gains for the department – we showcase the benefits of employing apprentices via our membership of the 5% Club.

### **Data on the national curriculum assessment at the end of key stage 2**

The committee also asked whether the department holds data, or research, on students who took national curriculum assessments at the end of key stage 2, and their comparable results at age 16 and 18 in the independent and state school sectors.

The department does not publish any data that answers this question directly. However, there is analysis from both Ofqual and AQA which, though it does not provide a complete picture, highlights some important trends, and which the Department has been examining.

Ofqual's 2021 equalities analysis<sup>2</sup> shows that being a candidate at an independent school at KS4 compared to being a candidate at an academy was associated with higher attainment at KS4 in 2019 (as well as in other years), when prior attainment is controlled for. It is important to note that this analysis does not control for other key characteristics that may be associated with both the likelihood of attending an independent school and higher attainment, such as parental education. Also, this analysis compares not only outcomes of candidates of different centre types with known prior attainment scores, but also outcomes of candidates with missing prior attainment scores.

AQA published [analysis](#) in 2010 assessing how well KS2 results predict GCSE attainment, which, though it was not produced for this purpose, allows some comparison of independent and state school candidates. In this case, however, the analysis only generated GCSE predictions for candidates that had valid KS2 test

---

<sup>1</sup> In the 2020 People Survey, the overall engagement score for our apprentices was 78%, compared to 69% for the department overall.

<sup>2</sup> This presents a regression analysis, which contains a centre type effect while controlling for prior attainment as well as region and subject, that partly answers the question raised p.105

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1010126/6828-3\\_Student-level\\_equalities\\_analysis\\_for\\_GCSE\\_and\\_A\\_level\\_summer\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1010126/6828-3_Student-level_equalities_analysis_for_GCSE_and_A_level_summer_2021.pdf)

results (in English, Maths and Science). This suggests that the value added at KS4 before the pandemic was higher in independent centres than the average in all centre types. The results vary by subject and grade threshold, in which can be seen in Section 3.2 and Appendix A – B.

Ofqual's recent analyses of this year's results show general stability in the differences in outcomes for students with different protected characteristics compared to previous years and increases in outcomes for many groups.<sup>3</sup> Ofqual have reported that this suggests the changes to the assessment arrangements in 2021 may have lessened the gaps in outcomes we might otherwise have seen.<sup>4</sup> The department remains committed to providing world-class education and training for everyone, whatever their background or characteristics, and will continue to take the action needed to address disparities, and help all pupils make up learning lost as a result of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

**SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD  
PERMANENT SECRETARY**

---

<sup>3</sup>Please see page 4 - 5 of Ofqual's equalities impact assessment for a full summary  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1010126/6828-3\\_Student-level\\_equalities\\_analysis\\_for\\_GCSE\\_and\\_A\\_level\\_summer\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1010126/6828-3_Student-level_equalities_analysis_for_GCSE_and_A_level_summer_2021.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [Guide to AS and A level results for England, 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-as-and-a-level-results-for-england-2021)