

# EDUCATION *Journal*

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## Child poverty will not fall

In the UK there are 4.3 million children living in poverty. That is 3 in every 10 children. That figure will not change over the period January 2025 to January 2029 under existing policies, including those announced by the relatively new Labour government. Even if Britain achieves the growth that the Government is desperate for, and there are indications that it will not in this time span, economic and employment growth alone will not be enough to reduce poverty levels.

This prediction is made in a new report published today by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). The report, *UK Poverty 2025*, is published alongside an analysis which uses the latest forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) and the Bank of England published since last year's election.

This suggests that without additional action from the Government, poverty and deep poverty will remain broadly flat between January 2025 and January 2029, and may well increase unless economic growth is accompanied by employment growth. The picture for child poverty is equally bleak with no progress against the Government's headline poverty measure under any scenario for GDP or employment growth. Child poverty is a known factor in educational under-achievement. Only in Scotland might things improve, but that will depend on the SNP government and any successor maintaining SNP policies aimed to reduce child poverty.

Across the UK, a strong economy can increase wages and employment but will not in itself reduce poverty. Even if the UK economy grows significantly more than expected, overall child poverty rates show little change and could even rise if growth benefits higher income households more than lower income ones. The report will be reviewed in next week's issue.

The JRF argues that the UK Government's child poverty strategy must abolish the two-child limit and introduce a protected minimum amount of support to Universal Credit. Later this year the UK Government will publish an 'ambitious' cross-government child poverty strategy. Any respectable child poverty strategy must include action on social security, the think tank argues.

At present Government policy is to do the opposite. The new Labour government decided to maintain the two-child limit. With the welfare budget set to balloon by billions, Labour are now looking at some of the same measures to cut the projected increase as the last Tory government did.

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## Remembering

**O**n Monday we marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day with a ceremony at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi German concentration camp in Poland, attended by world leaders including His Majesty King Charles III, President Macron of France and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine. Despite the camp being liberated by the Red Army in 1945, Russia was not invited to the ceremony because of its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Some 1.1 million people were exterminated in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex between 1942 and 1945, of whom 960,000 were Jews. Of these, 865,000 were gassed as soon as they arrived. Auschwitz was a major part of Germany's "final solution" of what it saw as its Jewish problem that saw the extermination of nearly six million Jews in death camps. Most were gassed. Some were shot. All were killed because they were Jews, and for no other reason. Today we call this the Holocaust. Every year we commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The small number of people who survived tell their stories of the camps. The numbers get fewer every year as survivors pass away. There were only fifty there this year, the 80th anniversary of the camp's liberation.

Every year, the Holocaust Educational Trust organises school visits to the camp. It is a very powerful message and those who have been are unlikely ever to forget the experience. Media personnel are also invited, including *Education Journal* which reported extensively on our visit more than a decade ago. Holocaust survivors also visit schools and talk about their experiences.

It is fortunate that Auschwitz-Birkenau was captured intact and a museum was established soon after the War. It is within reach of much of Europe and many children have been able to visit. The aim is to ensure that we never forget, and never repeat the unbelievable barbarity that Auschwitz-Birkenau and the other camps turned into an every day occurrence. As one survivor put it at the Remembrance Day event on Monday, she thought it incredible that in what she thought of as a major centre of European culture and science such an obscene event had become ordinary. Antisemitism was well known in Germany long before the extermination camps, for the roots of what happened in the camps go back many years before they were built. The casual antisemitism was open and virtually unchallenged in Germany, and other countries, long before the War.

In her book *Travellers in the Third Reich. The Rise of Fascism Through the Eyes of Everyday People*, the writer Julia Boyd uses a range of original source documents including letters home from tourists, to show what ordinary people thought in the inter-war years. Antisemitism was widespread and open in Germany, and quite a few of the British and American tourists who wrote home about it rather approved.

The first genocide of the 20th century was not the Holocaust. It was the mass murder of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks during the First World War. Just like the Wannsee conference of 1942, at which senior Nazis planned the Holocaust, so the Turks held a similar conference in Constantinople in 1916/17 to plan the extermination of the Armenians. Over a million died in the forced marches to the Syrian desert or were shot out of hand and their property looted. Despite their attempts at secrecy, there were 194 articles about it in the *New York Times* while the American Ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau, published a best selling book on it. Yet to this day the Turks deny that the genocide ever happened. The evidence that it did has always been in the Turkish Military Archives. Vahakn Dadrian and Taner Akcam published *Judgement at Istanbul* based on the archives.

When some of his generals objected to the Holocaust on the grounds of the repercussions, Hitler is said to have dismissed their fears by saying: "Who remembers the Armenians now?" Whether Hitler ever did say it we will never know, but the lessons of the Armenian genocide were not learned. Just over a decade later, from 1933 to 1936, Stalin murdered three million Ukrainians by starvation. Between 1933 and 1945 Stalin and Hitler murdered 14 million people none of whom were war casualties. The number of genocides since is almost endless: Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Sudan. We have not learned the lessons and even today we see almost daily civilians killed in the Middle East. Yet as the number of witnesses to the Holocaust dwindles, learning from their testimony is as necessary now as it ever was.

## 1.25 million young people not in work or full-time education

**R**esponding to the labour market stats release by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Stephen Evans, Chief Executive of Learning and Work Institute, said that a further worrying rise meant that currently 1.25 million young people were not in work or full-time education, which was up by 29% since the pandemic. He added that while the data were uncertain, rises seemed to be highest among young men.

Mr Evans urged the Government to redouble efforts to introduce a Youth Guarantee to ensure that every young person received the education and career support they needed.

## Responses to NAO report on school maintenance backlog

**F**ollowing a report published by the National Audit Office, and reviewed in last week's issue, which stated that there was a school maintenance backlog of £13.4 billion, Julia Harnden, Funding Specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders, said that the report had laid bare the scale of government neglect of the school and college estate.

She added that recent government investment looked tiny compared with the cuts that had taken place over the last 15 years and the level of need that had inevitably created down the line. Ms Harnden said that ASCL agreed with the NAO's recommendations and particularly the need for the Department for Education to set out an ambitious, long-term plan to ensure that school and college buildings were fit for the future. But she stressed that the Treasury would need to support the plan with investment, as short-term thinking and small-scale investment was just not going to cut it.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of NAHT, said that the damning report should serve as a timely reminder to the Government of the need to go further and faster in ensuring that all school buildings were safe and fit for purpose. He pointed out that the NAHT frequently heard from school leaders of the unacceptable conditions with which pupils and staff were having to contend, from crumbly concrete to leaking roofs, draughty portable cabins and school meals being served in corridors.

Mr Whiteman said that while the funding announced in the autumn Budget had been a welcome start, the Treasury had admitted that it would only get the existing inadequate 10-year rebuilding programme, which had been supposed to benefit only around 50 schools a year, back on track.

***“Paul Whiteman, general secretary of NAHT, said that the damning report should serve as a timely reminder to the Government of the need to go further and faster in ensuring that all school buildings were safe and fit for purpose.”***

# Majority of schools face funding cuts next year

**R**esearch released by the School Cuts coalition found that the vast majority of schools, 76% of primary schools and 94% of secondary schools, would not be able to afford their costs next year. The finding followed the Government's remit letter to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) which had recommended a 2.8% rise in teacher pay for 2025/26 but no new funding had been provided to cover it.

The School Cuts coalition argued that while the Government had admitted that most schools would not be able to cover the cost of staff pay rises next year, it expected schools to make efficiencies. The research revealed that schools' costs were expected to rise by 3.4% next year, but mainstream funding would increase by just 2.2%, which left a gap of £700million that the Government would need to increase school funding by, to fully fund staff pay awards.

***“The National Governance Association said that over a third of respondents to the NGA annual survey had described their organisation as financially unsustainable.”***

The coalition warned that the cut in funding would see overall per pupil funding drop to the lowest levels in England in real terms for at least 15 years, and every local authority in the country would see a reduction in real terms per pupil funding, with an average cut of 1.2%.

The findings concluded that the situation was particularly worrying given the current financial position of schools, and in December 2024, the Government published the accounts of local authority-maintained schools for the financial year 2023-24, which had showed that 1 in 7 schools were currently in deficit, an increase on the year before and the highest rate since at least 2010.

The School Cuts website is run by education unions National Education Union, Association of School and College Leaders and National Association of Head Teachers, and supported by Parentkind, and National Governance Association.

Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, said that at the last election, people had voted in the new Labour Government on a promise of change, and he argued that it was time for the Government to deliver on that promise and start with prioritising school funding.

Jason Elsom, chief executive of Parentkind, said that parents were worried about how the historic cuts to school budgets had impacted their children's education, and therefore Parentkind supported the campaign with the backing of parents.

Emma Balchin, National Governance Association (NGA) chief executive, said that over a third of respondents to the NGA annual survey had described their organisation as financially unsustainable. She pointed out that therefore the NGA had welcomed the education funding announcements in the budget, while financial challenges facing the sector would require consistent investment throughout the parliament.

Pepe Di'lasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, (ASCL) argued that schools, colleges and their staff were central to the Government's ambition to improve opportunities for young people, but he stressed that it would be difficult to see how that could be achieved if it could afford the cost of pay awards without having to make cuts.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), said it was becoming increasingly clear that school funding would not keep pace with growing costs next year, which had been independently verified by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and the data served to underscore the scale of the issue. He argued that schools had already had to make repeated cuts after more than a decade of austerity under the previous government and many parents were well-aware of the relentless budget pressures that their children's schools had faced.

# Employers support ban on unpaid internships

**R**esearch published by the Sutton Trust revealed a growing gap between working-class and middle-class graduates in getting into increasingly important internship routes into careers. The Trust said that the situation had been driven by employers continuing to underpay interns and to give opportunities to family and friends rather than advertising them.

The findings came as the Government was expected to announce tighter controls on the illegal practice of companies asking interns to work for free or below the minimum wage. A poll of recent graduates, conducted by Public First for the Sutton Trust, showed that over half (51%) had undertaken an internship, a growth of 12 percentage points since 2018. The findings found that a quarter (27%) had taken part in multiple internships. Graduates in London had been significantly more likely to have undertaken an internship than those in the West Midlands, Yorkshire, Scotland, and Wales.

The polling of employer HR decision-makers, also found that almost three fifths of those surveyed (59%) currently offered internships, which was up from 48% in 2018, which indicated the growing importance of internships as a route into professional careers. However, almost a third of graduates had said that they were only able to access their current job thanks to their internship.

The Trust said the gap between working-class graduates and their middle-class peers in accessing internships had widened substantially since 2018, and currently, the figure was 20 percentage points compared to 12 percentage points in 2018. The proportion of working-class graduates completing an internship is currently 36% compared to 55% for their middle-class peers.

The Trust pointed out that while internships were currently covered by general employment law, which stated that an intern was entitled to the national minimum wage (NMW), as well as other entitlements, if they were classified as a “worker,” which included somebody who had a contract and was carrying out any work as opposed to just observing. However, the Trust argued that there was confusion in terms of the law and a lack of enforcement meant that some employers were escaping sanction for offering unpaid or underpaid internships for work that should be covered by minimum wage law.

Despite the legal position, around three fifths (61%) of internships undertaken by recent graduates were “unpaid or underpaid”, which was down only slightly since 2018. Just below a quarter (23%) were paid less than the minimum wage, while 17% came with expenses only and 21% had no compensation at all. The Trust stressed that middle-class graduates were more likely than those from working-class backgrounds to have completed an unpaid or underpaid internship (37% compared to 28%). Graduates who undertook unpaid internships were able to do so because they received money from parents (40%), lived at home or with family or friends for free (39%) or used savings (29%).

Almost half of employers said that they offered internships paid at least at the minimum wage, while the proportion offering internships paid below the minimum wage had increased from 11% in 2018 to 17%. While 9% said that they offered internships without any compensation, a slight increase since 2018, three quarters of those providing internships said that a ban on unpaid internships would not impact the number of opportunities they provided, and just 8% said that they would need to substantially reduce the supply of opportunities.

The majority said that they wanted to see change on the issue, and 38% would like to see unpaid internships banned while 30% would like to see better enforcement of current minimum wage legislation.

***“The Trust argued that there was confusion in terms of the law and a lack of enforcement meant that some employers were escaping sanction for offering unpaid or underpaid internships for work that should be covered by minimum wage law.”***

# Improving education together board

**D**avid Hughes, Chief Executive, Association of Colleges, said that the AoC, had been pleased to be a member of the new Improving Education Together Board. He pointed out that the ambition was for ministers to be able to work closely with the board to develop and introduce policy that would improve education, valued the education profession, and boost opportunity for all.

Mr Hughes said that alongside the unions and other employer bodies he was sure that there would be good outcomes from the board because a partnership approach, as honest sharing of views and clarity on the key challenges and opportunities, could be a powerful force for good. He added that the focus on workforce, accountability and SEND were good initial areas to focus on, and that in colleges across the country, there were issues and challenges, as well expertise and good practice to share, in all three.

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## Technology in teaching

**C**ommenting on Bridget Phillipson's speech on a digital revolution in education, Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union (NEU), said that the positives of digital technology were obvious, including access to a wealth of online resources. But he argued that no screen could replicate the human connection between teachers and students, as it was how young people engaged best with education.

Mr Kebede said that while the NEU had been pleased to see the focus on training for teachers in the use of digital tools, the Government's ambitions must also be matched by significant investment in technology and IT infrastructure for schools.

He stressed the need to be mindful of the workload implications of introducing new technology and the training that went with it, as teacher workload was already unacceptably high. Mr Kebede added that while support for schools on commissioning and quality assurance of products and their value for money was welcome, partnership with the tech giants should not blind the Government to risks associated with their commercial interests and desire to dominate the education sector.

***“The NAHT, said that while AI had huge potential benefits for schools and children’s learning, it was important that they were harnessed in the right way, and that teachers retained professional oversight of learning.”***

Sarah Hannafin, head of policy for school leaders' union NAHT, said that while AI had huge potential benefits for schools and children's learning, it was important that they were harnessed in the right way, and that teachers retained professional oversight of learning. She stressed that it would be vital that teachers and school leaders received high-quality funded training and the guidance needed to be confident using AI themselves as well as teaching pupils about how to use AI tools appropriately in their learning and wider lives.

Ms Hannafin pointed out that because teachers were struggling with unsustainable levels of workload, it made sense to explore AI's potential to reduce that, however, that alone would not be enough to address the severe recruitment and retention crisis facing schools, with other measures, including action on pay, fundamental reform of inspection, and more flexible working, which were all crucial.



# SATs undermine a broad and balanced curriculum

**A** survey of over 1,500 members of the National Education Union who work as teachers in primary schools in England, found that the proportion of school hours devoted to English and maths was squeezing out other subjects. The NEU's analysis forms part of written evidence to the Government as it conducts a major review of curriculum and assessment (CAR).

The analysis highlighted how teaching hours were distributed, and the impact on learning time of preparations for Key Stage 2 tests (SATs). The analysis showed that:

- 58%, or 12 out of 20.5 weekly primary teaching hours, are spent on English and maths.
- The high stakes nature of SATs results for schools meant that Year 6 teachers were spending even more time per week on the subjects, an extra 14 minutes of English and 20 extra minutes of maths, or 61% overall.
- Both figures are in excess of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's recommendations on what constituted appropriate amounts of time to maintain a "broad and balanced curriculum."
- Some Foundation subjects were studied for less than an hour per week on average. Some pupils can go weeks of even half a term at a time without learning any history at all.
- There may also be health implications, as the most disadvantaged 20% of schools dedicated just 93 minutes a week on average to physical education (PE), which was 15 minutes a week less than schools with the lowest levels of disadvantage.
- Compared to QCA recommendations from two decades ago, time dedicated to science in Year 6 had dropped from 120 to 80 minutes, which correlated with a decline in England's Pisa ranking in the subject.

Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, said that for decades the profession had known that SATs and the culture surrounding the assessments mainly benefitted the Government and the publication of league tables, but they did not benefit learning, and they did a great deal to damage the potential for a broad and balanced curriculum.

He said that while the NEU welcomed the Government's intention to move back to a national curriculum for all schools, including academies, it would only be effective if other subjects were not suffocated by other subjects to serve Government tests in English and maths. Mr Kebede pointed out that as the survey showed, the pressures of high-stakes assessments were constraining the range that schools can offer.

He said that the aims of the Government's review were to "deliver a curriculum which was rich and broad, inclusive, and innovative." But Mr Kebede stressed that if schools were under pressure to use more than half of curriculum time for English and Maths alone, the objectives risked being undermined. He added that for the Government to achieve its opportunity mission, the review must not only address the disparity in access to different subjects in the curriculum but also face up to the fact that it was driving schools down that road.

***"Mr Kebede pointed out that as the survey showed, the pressures of high-stakes assessments were constraining the range that schools can offer."***

# Reform of Scottish national education bodies

**T**he funding system which covers universities, colleges and apprenticeships, as well as student support, will change in Scotland. Under plans published last week, responsibility for providing national training programmes, including apprenticeships, will move from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

SFC's responsibilities for funding further education student support will move to the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS), bringing this together with SAAS's existing responsibilities for higher education student support.

The plans are being taken forward following extensive consultation across the sector and legislation will be published in the coming weeks with the intention of making these changes in autumn 2026.

Higher and Further Education Minister Graeme Dey said: "We want to ensure that Scotland has a world-class skills system to meet the demands of the changing economy and that our £3 billion of investment in the tertiary skills system delivers the greatest impact for learners.

"The need for this change is now clear, with consultation responses and other evidence supporting reform to arrangements for post-school funding. These changes will help to reduce complexities and provide greater clarity around the roles and responsibilities of each funding body. We will now look to press ahead with the next stage in taking forward these changes, through legislation and other preparations. We also will work closely with SAAS, SDS and the SFC to reassure staff and ensure continuity of services."

The planned changes follow a consultation which took place last summer and for which a report summarising responses was published last week along with an outline business case. SDS will continue to play a key role in the skills system, including its ongoing careers delivery.

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## HoW College launches 5Cs initiative to prepare students for the workplace

**H**eat of Worcestershire College (HoW College) is preparing students for the workplace with the launch of its innovative 5Cs initiative. New for the current academic year, this framework focuses on equipping students with the core skills most valued by employers. While technical skills remain important, 5Cs address the attributes that make someone an outstanding candidate for any role.

Created in collaboration with students, staff and potential employers, and to meet the need of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the 5Cs are designed to ensure that students are work-ready, possessing the critical 21st-century skills employers seek. They are:

- Critical thinking: Research, problem solving, analysis, scrutiny, decision making, diversity of opinion.
- Creativity: Design, innovation, resourcefulness, adaptability, and idea generation.
- Communication: Writing and listening, digital, personal reflection, summarising, presenting and negotiation.
- Collaboration: Teamwork, inclusivity, participation, engagement, interpersonal skills, and conflict resolution.
- Company behaviours: Time management, professionalism, accountability, reliability.

Michelle Dowse, Principal and CEO of HoW College, said: "The 5Cs initiative reflects our commitment to preparing students not just for jobs, but for successful, impactful careers. By focusing on these essential skills, we ensure our students are confident, adaptable, and ready to thrive in any professional environment." Sharon Smith, Chief Executive of Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, said, "The launch of the 5Cs initiative by HoW College is a fantastic step forward in addressing the skills gap that many employers are currently facing. Businesses in our region have long expressed the need for candidates who not only have technical proficiency but also possess critical soft skills, such as effective communication, teamwork, and the ability to think creatively and solve problems."

## Church of England launches Flourishing Leaders Framework at National Education Conference

**A**t the end of last week the Church of England launched the Flourishing Leaders Programmes at its 7th annual Education Conference in London. This initiative aims to transform schools into environments where both students and teachers can thrive. The conference, held at St John's Church in Hackney, a location of historical significance, brought together educators, young leaders, and various stakeholders in the education sector. The Flourishing Leaders Programmes build on the Flourishing Together document, which outlines a vision for addressing systemic challenges through a focus on purpose, relationships, resources, learning, and wellbeing.

Andy Wolfe, the Executive Director of Education for the Church of England, emphasised the importance of creating environments where both students and educators can flourish. He highlighted that flourishing educators are essential for flourishing students and that a system where teachers and leaders thrive creates the conditions for young people to achieve their full potential. Wolfe also mentioned that the programmes would support educators at every level, from early career teachers to system leaders, with a focus on purpose, relationships, and wellbeing. Already, 900 schools and colleges have committed to piloting these courses, which will commence in autumn 2025.

The conference featured workshops on various topics and memorable contributions from children and young people of the Twyford CofE Academies Trust, whose leading of sung worship received a standing ovation. Delegates, including teachers, heads, clergy, governors, and those in education and diocesan leadership, gathered to discuss the transformative potential of the Flourishing Leaders Programmes. The day also included a panel discussion on the '10 Seeds of Flourishing,' which highlighted the importance of reshaping education to support both student and teacher well-being, emphasizing professional development, inclusivity, and the need for systemic change.

Leora Cruddas, CEO of the Confederation of School Trusts, spoke about a shared vision for education that intrinsically motivates educators. She called for a fundamental shift in how the system addresses inequities, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those in poverty. Cruddas emphasized that placing the most vulnerable at the centre of systems design is essential for building a truly great education system.

The Church's Chief Education Officer, Nigel Genders, opened the conference by recognizing the immense challenges faced by the education sector over the past year, including global and national upheavals. He called for a renewed focus on enabling leaders and teachers to flourish, drawing on the themes of wisdom, knowledge, and joy outlined in the Church of England's vision for education. Genders also celebrated the involvement of children and young people in leading the day's music and hosting, which left a lasting impression on attendees.

Sir Hamid Patel, in his keynote speech, reflected on the historical role of church schools in transforming lives through education. He highlighted their legacy of social justice and commitment to providing opportunities for all children, regardless of background. Patel acknowledged the challenges faced by schools today, such as poverty, mental health issues, teacher recruitment, and the impact of social media. He urged leaders to act with faith, passion, and purpose, emphasizing the need for schools to be centres of community, fostering belonging, and equipping young people to overcome disadvantage and discover their full potential.

In the afternoon session, Sufian Sadiq, Director of Teaching School at Chiltern Learning Trust, spoke about 'The Class of 2040,' an idea that recognizes children finishing their secondary education in 2040 are already in the system this year as reception pupils. He encouraged attendees to adopt a long-term perspective in shaping educational practices. The conference concluded with prayers for education leaders, led by the Bishop of Portsmouth, Jonathan Frost, who chairs the National Society.

## Technical education in England

**T**he last Conservative government wanted to reform technical education in England and introduced T-levels as a technical equivalent to academic A-levels. The new Labour government instituted a review of this policy and has now come up with its conclusions. The Department for Education now wants to make A Levels and their new technical alternative, T Levels, the main further education qualifications at age 16 in England. They'll sit alongside apprenticeships and a range of complementary level 3 qualifications, including applied general qualifications such as BTECs. Labour have not gone as far as the Conservatives in defunding applied general qualifications, recognising that some have a valid place in technical education. There was more than a suspicion that the Tories wanted to defund applied general qualifications as a way of removing competition to T-levels.

Yet funding for many other existing qualifications will still be removed. These reforms, initially announced in July 2021 and recently reviewed by the new Labour government, are part of wider efforts to overhaul the further education system, and particularly the technical education system.

### What are level 3 qualifications?

Most qualifications have a difficulty level. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland there are nine qualification levels, ranging from entry level (which has three sub-levels) to level 8. The higher the level, the more difficult the qualification.

Level 3 qualifications are mainly taken by young people after their GCSEs (level 2), but some are also funded for adults. [1] They can precede higher education qualifications at levels 4 and 5 (such as higher technical qualifications, higher national certificates, and higher national diplomas) and at level 6 (undergraduate degrees and higher and degree apprenticeships). Most young people pursuing a level 3 qualification in England are studying academic qualifications, with AS/A Levels the most popular. These qualifications help students to progress into further study in higher education.

In 2023, of the 886,000 16- and 17-year-olds studying for a level 3 qualification (65.6% of the total 16- and 17-year old population), 611,000 were studying AS/A Levels (45.2% of the total 16- and 17-year old population). [2] 138,000 of those studying A/AS Levels were doing so alongside an applied general qualification (10.2% of the population). These are qualifications that allow students to develop transferable knowledge and skills through applied learning. They are often in technical or vocational subjects and are known by their brand name, such as BTECs and Cambridge Technicals. In 2023, there were 107,000 16- and 17-year-olds studying solely Applied General qualifications (7.9%), as well as 33,000 (2.4%) studying Tech Level qualifications. There were 20,740 16- and 17-year-olds (1.5%) studying T Levels. Graphic 1 on the next page shows the relative number of students taking each different type of level 3 qualification.

### Why does the government want to reform level 3 qualifications?

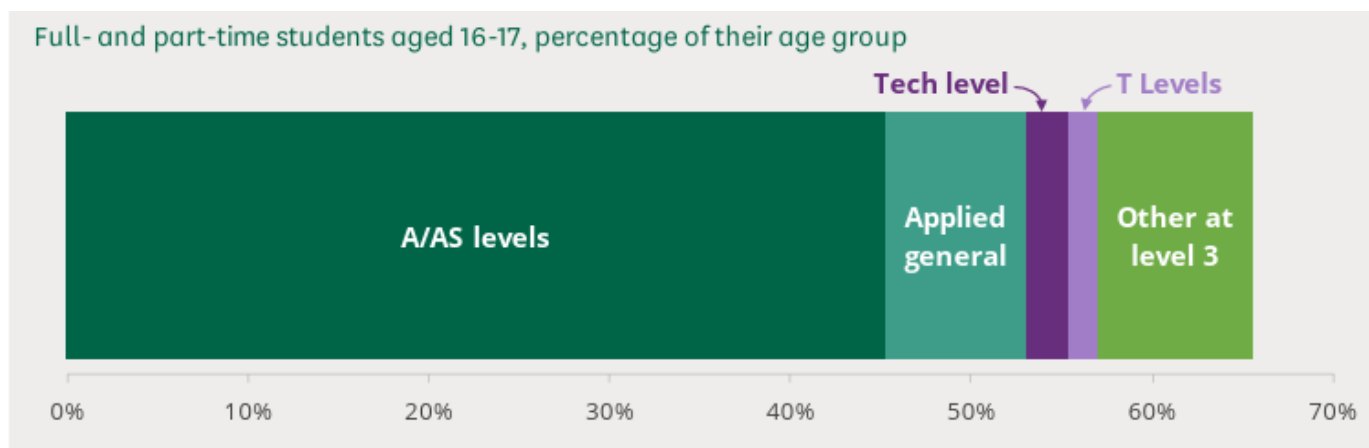
Between March and June 2019, the Department for Education consulted on the principles that should apply to level 3 qualifications and below in England. [3] The Department for Education said its aim was to create "a more streamlined, simplified and ambitious technical qualifications system", in which all publicly funded qualifications demonstrated the principles of "quality, purpose, necessity and progression." [4] As part of this consultation, the Department for Education published a case for change, [5] which drew on independent reviews of the further education system commissioned by the government in 2011 (the 'Wolf Review') and in 2016 (the 'Sainsbury Review'). [6] The Department for Education argued reforms were necessary for the following reasons:

- High quality qualifications are needed to address significant skills gaps and aid social mobility.

*(Continued on page 13.)*

*(Continued from page 12.)*

## Graphic 1. Highest qualification aim of level 3 students, England 2023



Source: Department for Education, [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, 2023](#), 26 September 2024

- The existing system is complex and of variable quality. At July 2018, there were 4,000 level 3 qualifications eligible for public funding. [7] Many were duplicates in the same subject, including over 200 different engineering qualifications.
- The system is not working for all students.
- Recent controls have not been fully effective in raising quality and have limitations. [8]

### How will the new system work?

Following a consultation on post-16 qualifications at level 3 in 2020/21, the Conservative government published a policy statement in July 2021 that set out changes to level 3 qualifications in England. [9] The government's policy statement said it wanted to create "clearly defined academic and technical routes" for post-16 progression. [10] The government hopes the reforms will remove "low-quality qualifications" from the system, and ensure students have confidence in the outcomes of their choices. [11] The government said A Levels would be central to the academic route, which is intended to lead to higher education study at university, [12] while T Levels would become the main qualification option for the technical route, supporting progression into skilled employment (requiring specialist training or expertise), further technical study or apprenticeships, and potentially higher education courses. [13] Other level 3 qualifications, including applied general qualifications, will sit alongside A Levels and T Levels, but the Conservative government said they would need to demonstrate their quality and distinct purpose to continue to receiving public funding, with overlapping qualifications, including BTECs that overlap with T Level subjects, set to no longer receive public funding. [14]

### Labour government review of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3

In June 2023, the then-Shadow Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, pledged that a future Labour government would pause and review the removal of funding from many level 3 qualifications. [15] On 25 July 2024, the new Labour government announced a "short review" of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3 and below that would conclude before the end of the year. [16] The removal of funding from qualifications in construction and the built environment; digital; education and early years; and health and science, which was due to happen from August 2024, was paused. As part of the review, the Department for Education (DfE) considered all level 3 qualifications that were in scope to have public funding removed from 1 August 2025. This included:

*(Continued on page 14.)*

*(Continued from page 13.)*

- Qualifications that overlap with T Levels in waves 1, 2, 3 or 4.
- Level 3 qualifications that were in scope to have funding removed because they did not meet new quality criteria.
- Qualifications that providers identified as being replaced by a reformed qualification.

The point of the review was to determine if any qualifications in line to be defunded should be retained, and to consider how long they should be kept available. In September 2024, the Minister for Skills, Jacqui Smith, said she recognised there was a need to retain other qualifications alongside T Levels and A Levels. She said: Where the review identifies the balance of learner and employer needs within a sector requires level 3 qualifications other than T Levels and A levels, we will maintain the relevant qualifications. This may well be in areas that overlap with T Levels, which is a change from the approach taken by the last government. [17]

### **Outcomes**

On 12 December 2024, the government announced the outcomes of its review and said the new position was fixed until 2027. [18] The outcomes included:

- 157 qualifications due to lose their funding will instead have it extended to allow reformed qualifications to be established and embedded in the system. The retained qualifications include:
  - 57 qualifications in digital, construction, and health and science (now due to be funded until July 2026)
  - 100 qualifications in engineering, agriculture, business, and creative (now due to be funded until July 2027).
- Funding will continue to be withdrawn for the other qualifications in scope of the review, including more than 200 qualifications with low or no enrolments.
- Previously proposed funding rules limiting providers and students on which types of qualifications can be combined have been dropped.
- The government’s curriculum and assessment review will take a view on qualifications in the long term, but the DfE will invite awarding organisations to submit further new level 3 qualifications in the spring in health and science, construction, digital, and education and early years, as well as in the care services route.

Informing the House of Commons of the review outcomes, the Education Minister Janet Daby said the government believed T Levels were “an excellent qualification that should be available to more young people”, and that the decision to retain funding for some qualifications would allow for the needs of learners and employers to be met while the transition to T Levels being “the large technical qualification of choice” continued. [19] Decisions on each qualification in the scope of the review are available in Department for Education guidance. [20] This review delighted providers like Pearson, who own the popular BTEC brand but did not have a contract for T-levels. But this is a short-term fix. The Government’s long-term plans have yet to be announced, although they might be as part of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, for which an announcement is expected on 24 February.

### **The development of T Levels**

In November 2015, an Independent Panel on Technical Education was established by the then-Minister for

*(Continued on page 15.)*

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Skills, Nick Boles. The Panel was chaired by Lord Sainsbury and tasked with advising the Government on actions to improve the quality of technical education in England.

In April 2016, the Panel completed its report (PDF) and it was published by the government in July 2016. In setting out the need for reform, the report said the UK's economy was being held back by a "long-term productivity problem" and years of undertraining had led to "a chronic shortage of people with technician-Level skills." [21] The report argued investment in the development of technical skills was essential to enhancing productivity.

In addition to this economic rationale for reform, the report outlined a social need for change. It said individuals should have access to a national system of technical qualifications that is easy to understand, has credibility with employers, and remains stable over time. [22] The current system, the report argued, failed on all three counts, comprising "a confusing and everchanging multitude of qualifications", many of which "hold little value in the eyes of individuals and are not understood or sought by employers." [22] The Panel put forward 34 recommendations in its report, which were aimed at "systematically reform[ing] technical education for the long term" and "ensuring individuals can develop the technical knowledge and skills that industry needs through education and training." [23]

### Skills England

Skills England is a new body that was launched in July 2024 in shadow form and will be fully established in phases over the next 9 to 12 months as the successor to Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. [24] It will operate as an executive agency of the Department for Education, which will take on the functions of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. These functions will include: • Working with employers to develop, approve, and review occupational standards. These are used in the development of apprenticeships, T Levels, and other IfATE-approved technical qualifications.

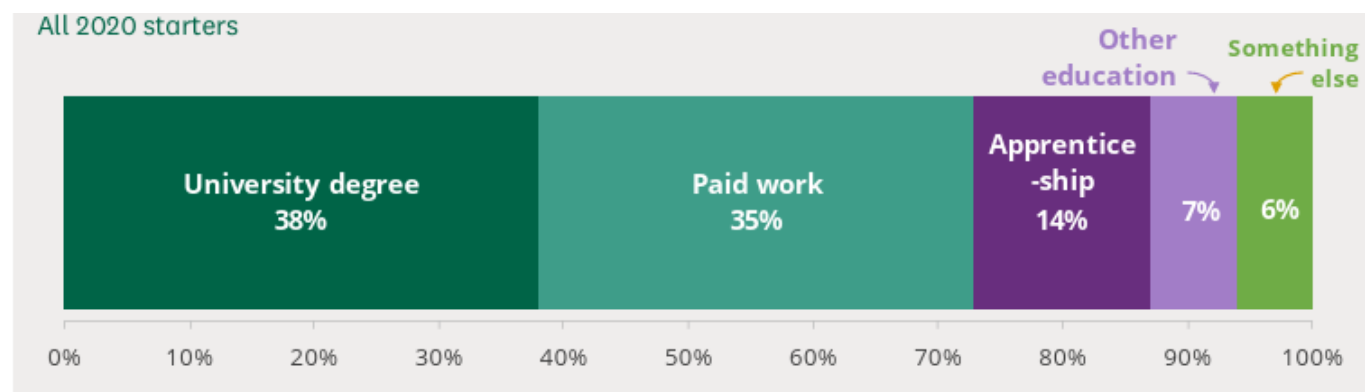
The T Level Capital Fund was established to support further education providers in acquiring facilities and equipment for the delivery of T Level courses. There are two elements to the fund:

- The Specialist Equipment Allocation (SEA), which is awarded to providers using a formula allocation.
- The Buildings and Facilities Improvement Grant (BFIG), which providers bid for. The Department for Education has said: "All T Level providers will receive funding for state-of-the-art specialist equipment and all providers, apart from independent training providers, can bid for funding to refurbish existing facilities or build new buildings." [25]

### Destination data

A survey of the first cohort of T Level students in 2023, around nine months after completion of their T levels, found respondents were undertaking the following activities.

### Graphic 2. Current main activity in 2023 of the first cohort of T-level students



Source: DfE, [Technical education learner survey 2023: progression of the first T Level cohort](#) (April 2024)

*(Continued on page 16.)*

*(Continued from page 15.)*

### **National Foundation for Educational Research reports**

In June 2019, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published a report based on interviews with 25 of the first 50 T Level providers.<sup>235</sup> The report said providers welcomed the support they had received from the Government and felt confident they have the capacity and expertise to deliver the first three T Levels. However, they also expressed a number of concerns, including:

- The tight implementation timescale does not allow much time for detailed curriculum planning and staff training.
- Practical concerns relating to the delivery of industry placements, including the lack of large employers in rural areas and challenges for students travelling to and from placements.
- Potential challenges around student take-up over the longer term.<sup>236</sup> December 2019 follow-up report In December 2019, the NFER published a follow-up to their June 2019 report, based on discussions that took place at a T Levels roundtable event in October 2019. The report said most of the NFER's earlier findings still resonated and providers "were generally optimistic about the future of T Levels." However, it also highlighted a number of challenges that remained, including:
  - While the T Level communications campaign was welcomed, it was felt there "remained significant work to do to raise the awareness and understanding of T Levels."

In December 2019, the NFER published a follow-up to their June 2019 report, based on discussions that took place at a T Levels roundtable event in October 2019. The report said most of the NFER's earlier findings still resonated and providers "were generally optimistic about the future of T Levels." It also highlighted a number of challenges that remained, including: a number of practical challenges remained around industry placements, particularly with regards securing them at scale once T Levels are fully rolled-out; while providers felt they had the staff required for delivery from September 2020, they "remained concerned about staff recruitment and retention in the longer-term"; questions were raised regarding whether Russell Group universities will accept T Level students and what type of courses T Level students will be able to progress to; and there remained some concerns about what is going to happen to other Level 3 qualifications, in particular BTECs. [26]

### **Foot notes**

[1] Department for Education, *Free Courses for Jobs*.

[2] Department for Education, *Participation in Education, Training and Employment Age 16 to 18, Calendar Year 2023*, 26 September 2024.

[3] Department for Education, *Review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 and Below in England*, March 2019.

[4] Department for Education, *Review of Post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and Below in England: Government consultation document*, March 2019, page 8.

[5] Department for Education, *Review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 and Below in England: The current system and the case for change*, March 2019.

[6] Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, *Review of Vocational Education: The Wolf report*, March 2011; Department for Education and Department for Business,

*(Continued on page 19.)*



*(Continued from page 16.)*

Innovation & Skills, *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*, April 2016.

[7] Department for Education, *Students and qualifications at Level 3 and below in England*, March 2019.

[8] Department for Education, *Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below in England: The current system and the case for change*, March 2019 .

[9] Department for Education, *Review of post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement*, 14 July 2021.

[10] Department for Education, *Review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement*, 14 July 2021, page 4.

[11] Department for Education, *Clearer Choice of High-quality Post-16 qualifications*, 14 July 2021.

[12] Department for Education, *Review of Post-16 Qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement*, 14 July 2021, page 11.

[13] Department for Education, *Review of Post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: Policy statement*, 14 July 2021, page 11.

[14] Department for Education, *Guide to the Post-16 qualifications Landscape at Level 3 and Below for 2025 and Beyond*, April 2023.

[15] “Labour pledges to pause and review BTECs cull”, *FE Week*, 27 October 2023.

[16] Answer to Parliamentary Question in the House of Commons, HCWS22 [Technical Qualifications Reform update] 25 July 2024.

[17] “How we'll go about reforming the level 3 landscape”, *FE Week*, 30 September 2024.

[18] House of Commons debates [Qualifications reform review] 12 December 2024.

[19] House of Commons debates [Qualifications reform review] 12 December 2024 .

[20] Department for Education, *Review of level 3 qualifications reform: provisional outcomes*, 12 December 2024.

[21] Department for Education, *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*, July 2016, p 22.

[22] Department for Education, *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*, July 2016, pages 22-23.

[23] Department for Education, *Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education*, July 2016, p 8.

[24] Department for Education, *Skills England to transform opportunities and drive growth*, 22 July 2024.

[25] Department for Education, *Introduction of T Levels*, June 2022.

[26] NFER, *T Levels Research: How Are Providers Preparing for Delivery*, June 2019; *New T Levels research from NFER - Providers say ‘good support so far but still room for improvement’*, 20 June 2019.

## IFS Part 3: Colleges and skills

*Annual Report on Education Spending in England: 2024–25*, by Elaine Drayton, Christine Farquharson, Kate Ogden, Luke Sibieta, Darcey Snape and Imran Tahir, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), ISBN 978-1-80103-212-4. Published on Wednesday 8 January 2025.

<https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-01/IFS-REPORT-EDUCATION-SPENDING-2024-2025.1.pdf>

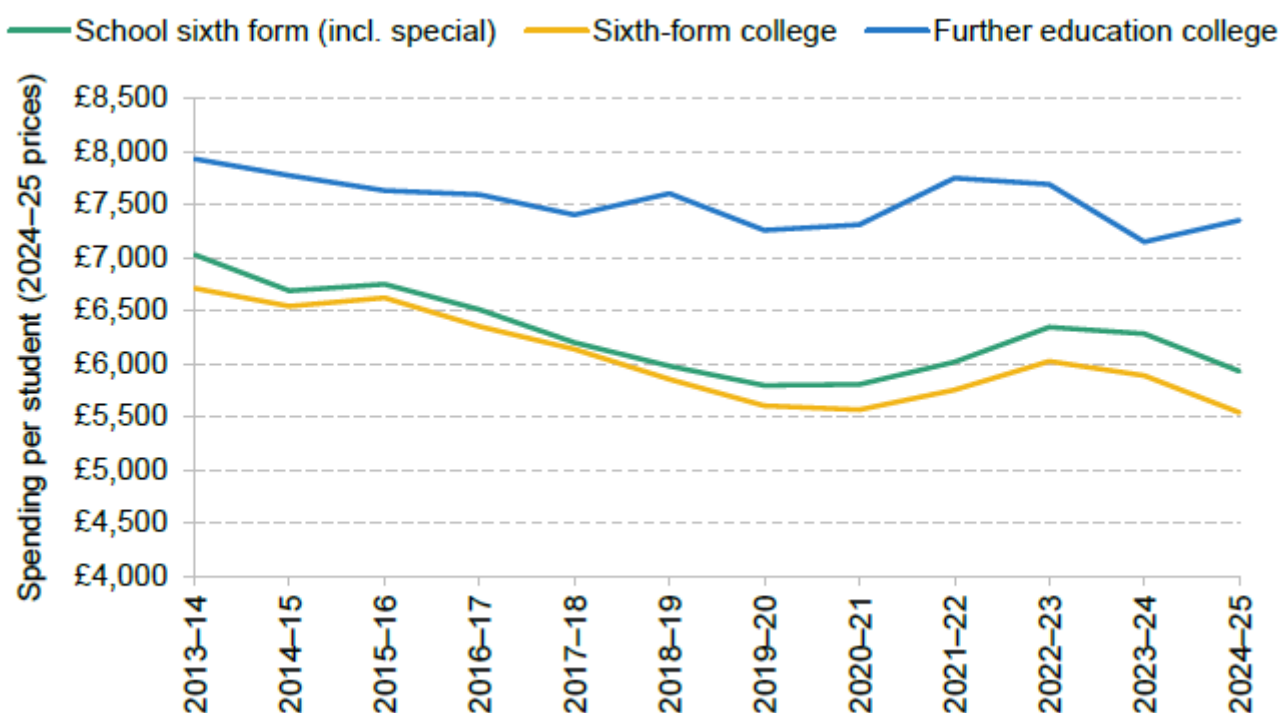
**Three weeks ago the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) published its annual report on education spending in England. This review is the third part of our coverage of the research and concentrates on colleges and adult education and skills. It found that spending on colleges and sixth forms remains well below 2010 levels, and pressures are growing.**

Even with recent funding increases, the IFS estimates that college funding per student aged 16–18 in 2025 will still be about 11% below 2010 levels, and about 23% lower for school sixth forms. About 37% of colleges were operating deficits at the latest count (2022–23). Average college teacher pay is expected to be about 18% lower than pay for school teachers in 2025, contributing to the high exit rates amongst college teachers (with 16% leaving their jobs each year). Meanwhile the number of young people in colleges and sixth forms is expected to grow by 5% or over 60,000 between 2024 and 2028. The Government would need to increase annual funding by £200 million in 2027–28 in today’s prices to maintain spending per student in real terms.

Further education encompasses a wide range of academic and vocational courses taken by young people and adults. In this chapter, the IFS divide further education into 16–18 education and adult education. This review focuses mainly on adult education.

Of all areas of education spending, further education faced the deepest cuts in the decade following 2010. This reflects a persistent historical trend: when overall spending increases, further education tends to receive smaller boosts, and when budgets are tightened, it often bears the brunt of the reductions. While there has been additional funding for the sector since 2019, including an additional £300

**Graphic 1. Funding per student in further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and school**



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million announced in the Autumn Budget 2024, the increases have fallen short of reversing the substantial real-terms cuts experienced since 2010. Within the college sector, funding for FE colleges is higher than for school sixth forms or sixth form colleges. (See graphic 1 above.)

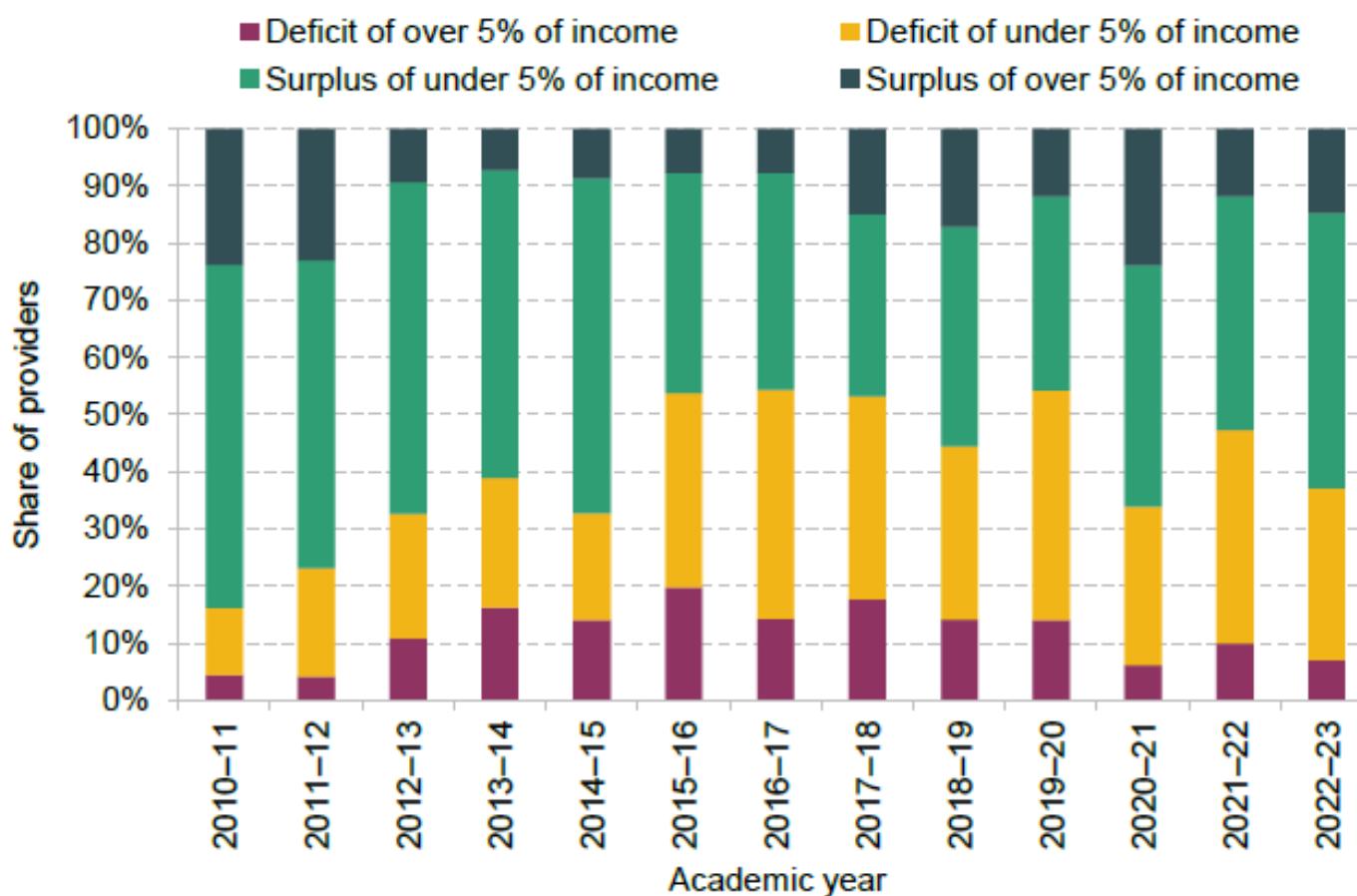
Further education colleges and sixth forms have faced a sustained real-terms decline in funding. With the spending review in 2025 set to determine future funding levels, the sector faces several important challenges. These include increasing student numbers, rising cost pressures and ongoing qualification reform.

### College finances and staff costs

The financial health of further education colleges has deteriorated since the early 2010s (Moura and Tahir, 2024). Graphic 2 below presents the distribution of deficits and surpluses among colleges in England (a key indicator of financial health). Based on this measure, the financial health of the college sector declined in the early 2010s. In 2010–11, only 16% of colleges (weighted by income) were operating in deficit. By 2015–16, this proportion had more than tripled, with 54% of institutions reporting deficits, and nearly one in five colleges showing deficits exceeding 5% of their income. Although there has been some improvement since 2017, 37% of colleges reported operating in deficit in 2022–23 (the latest year for which data are available). While a single year of deficit does not necessarily indicate financial distress, 44% of these colleges had been in deficit for at least three consecutive years.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) financial scores, which assess colleges based on their solvency and borrowing levels, provide another measure of financial health. According to this measure, nearly one in five colleges were rated as either ‘inadequate’ or ‘requiring improvement’ in 2022–

**Graphic 2. The distribution of deficits and surpluses across English colleges**



Source: Figure 4 in Moura and Tahir (2024).

*(Continued on page 20.)*

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23, meaning they face significant financial risks and limited capacity to respond to challenges. This highlights the challenging financial situation that many further education providers are currently facing.

In common with the rest of the education sector, further education providers have grappled with rising costs for key inputs such as staff salaries and energy in recent years. Staff costs represent the largest expenditure category, accounting for approximately 70% of total expenditure in England's further education colleges (Moura and Tahir, 2024), so further increases in staff costs will particularly affect the finances of the sector. In the coming years, pressures to increase staff salaries are likely to intensify, particularly in light of ongoing pay disputes and strike action across the sector. [1]

College staff have experienced significant real-terms pay cuts since 2010. There have been especially sharp declines in recent years due to high levels of inflation. The median salary for school teachers is currently around £44,000, and for college teachers around £38,000. The gap in median salary between school and college teachers is now around £5,500 or 15% (Moura and Tahir, 2024). The existing pay gap is set to widen during 2024–25, with school teachers set to receive a 5.5% pay rise this academic year while the Association of Colleges has recommended a 2.5% increase or £750 – whichever is higher – for college staff this academic year. [2] As a result, the forecast salary gap in the 2024–25 academic year is set to increase to almost £7,000 or 18% – the largest gap on record. Unlike for schools, no additional government funding has been made available to fund salary increases for college teachers, which means that any pay increase will have to be funded from existing college budgets.

It is within this context that the Autumn Budget 2024 introduced two key changes to employer taxes, which will directly affect the finances of further education providers. First, employers' NICs will increase by 1.2 percentage points starting in April 2025, as part of a broader package of tax increases. While there is expected to be additional funding to cover these costs at the national level, the details have not been confirmed. Second, the threshold at which employers begin paying NICs will be reduced from £9,100 to £5,000 per employee until 2028. This change is likely to increase financial pressures for private providers and small training organisations, which may face additional challenges in managing staff costs.

### **Qualification reform**

A persistent challenge for the further education sector is ongoing uncertainty surrounding the post-16 qualification landscape. After age 16, young people can choose from a wide range of qualifications and courses. Beyond A-levels, the picture becomes more complex. Around 19% of students currently take other level 3 qualifications, such as BTECs. 15% study level 2 qualifications, often retaking their GCSEs. Additionally, 6% of young people engage in apprenticeships or other forms of training, although this figure has declined significantly, nearly halving since 2004.

Over the past two decades, England's post-16 qualification system has experienced frequent reforms, including changes to funding and financing, as governments have sought to increase participation and steer young people towards particular qualifications. Among the most significant recent changes is the introduction of T levels in 2020, which are designed to provide a technical alternative to the traditional A level pathway. To encourage uptake, the previous government announced plans to withdraw funding from technical qualifications that overlap with T levels from August 2024. This policy would have affected funding for approximately 134 qualifications, affecting around 40,000 enrolments among 16- to 19-year-olds – representing 2% of all level 3 enrolments and 6% of non-A level enrolments at this level.

The current government has recently revised its approach to level 3 qualification reform, allowing 70% of qualifications previously earmarked for defunding to remain funded. [3] The reduction in the number of qualifications removed from funding is likely to be pragmatic, as there is still debate about the merits of T levels. The uptake of T levels remains limited – around 20,000 students or 1.5% of all students currently take T levels. There are also practical challenges with T levels, such as the feasibility of providing the required industry placements.

Before deciding whether to withdraw funding from a wider range of level 3 qualifications in the future, the government needs to address these issues to ensure that T levels can become a viable

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alternative on a wider scale.

The Government has also recently announced that the ABS will not be going ahead. [4] The ABS was proposed as a new baccalaureate-style qualification for 16- to 18-year-olds that would replace A levels and T levels in a decade's time. The ABS promised increased tuition time and additional opportunities, but it would likely have caused significant disruption and required substantial funding to deliver. Its cancellation reflects the continual cycle of qualification reforms, which often result in significant changes to the system that prevent stability and make planning immensely difficult for further education providers.

### **Adult education and skills**

Few areas of public policy have seen as much change as adult education and skills. Since the early 2000s, a series of major reforms has shaped a post-18 education system that can often be challenging for both individuals and employers to navigate. The pace of change shows no signs of slowing under the new government, with the creation of Skills England, major reforms to the apprenticeship levy, and the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) all on the agenda. Underpinning these policy reforms is a funding environment characterised by substantial real-terms reductions since the early 2000s and significant shifts in the allocation of public funds across different areas of adult education.

Public spending on adult education and skills can be divided into three main categories:

1. classroom-based learning, including basic skills and qualifications at multiple levels;
2. subsidies for work-based learning, such as apprenticeships;
3. loans for further education courses, known as advanced learner loans.

### **Adult education spending over time**

Graphic 3 below illustrates public spending on adult education and apprenticeships, covering the period from the early 2000s to the present, along with projections for 2024–25. The chart presents total public funding and divides it into three categories: classroom-based learning, work-based learning, and loans issued through advanced learner loans.

Public funding for adult skills has declined significantly since its peak in the early 2000s. In 2023–24, spending stood at approximately £4.3 billion, which means it has fallen by a third compared to its inflation-adjusted high of £6.3 billion in 2003–04. The decline has been particularly steep in classroom-based learning, where expenditure has fallen by two-thirds, from £5.1 billion in the early 2000s to £1.7 billion in 2023–24.

In the 2000s, some of the reductions in classroom-based funding were redirected towards workbased learning, keeping overall spending relatively stable during this period. Expenditure on work-based learning reached its highest point in 2009–10, driven by the introduction of the Train to Gain programme, which peaked at £2.8 billion. In the 2010s, spending on work-based learning settled at around £2 billion annually (in today's prices) as funding for classroom-based learning continued to decline. Since 2020, public spending on apprenticeships has increased and currently stands at around £2.5 billion. Advanced learner loans, introduced in 2013–14, have consistently accounted for a small portion of total skills funding. By 2023–24, approximately £100 million was issued through these loans, making up just 2.5% of the overall skills budget.

The 2021 spending review allocated an additional £900 million in day-to-day funding for adult education in 2024–25 compared with 2019–20 (Drayton et al., 2023). As a result, total spending on adult skills is projected to rise by 12% in real terms over this period. However, similar to funding for 16–18 education, these funding increases only partially offset previous reductions.

By 2024–25, total skills funding will be 23% lower than in 2009–10. The decline is particularly stark for classroom-based adult education, where funding – even with the additional investment – will still be over 40% below 2009–10 levels.

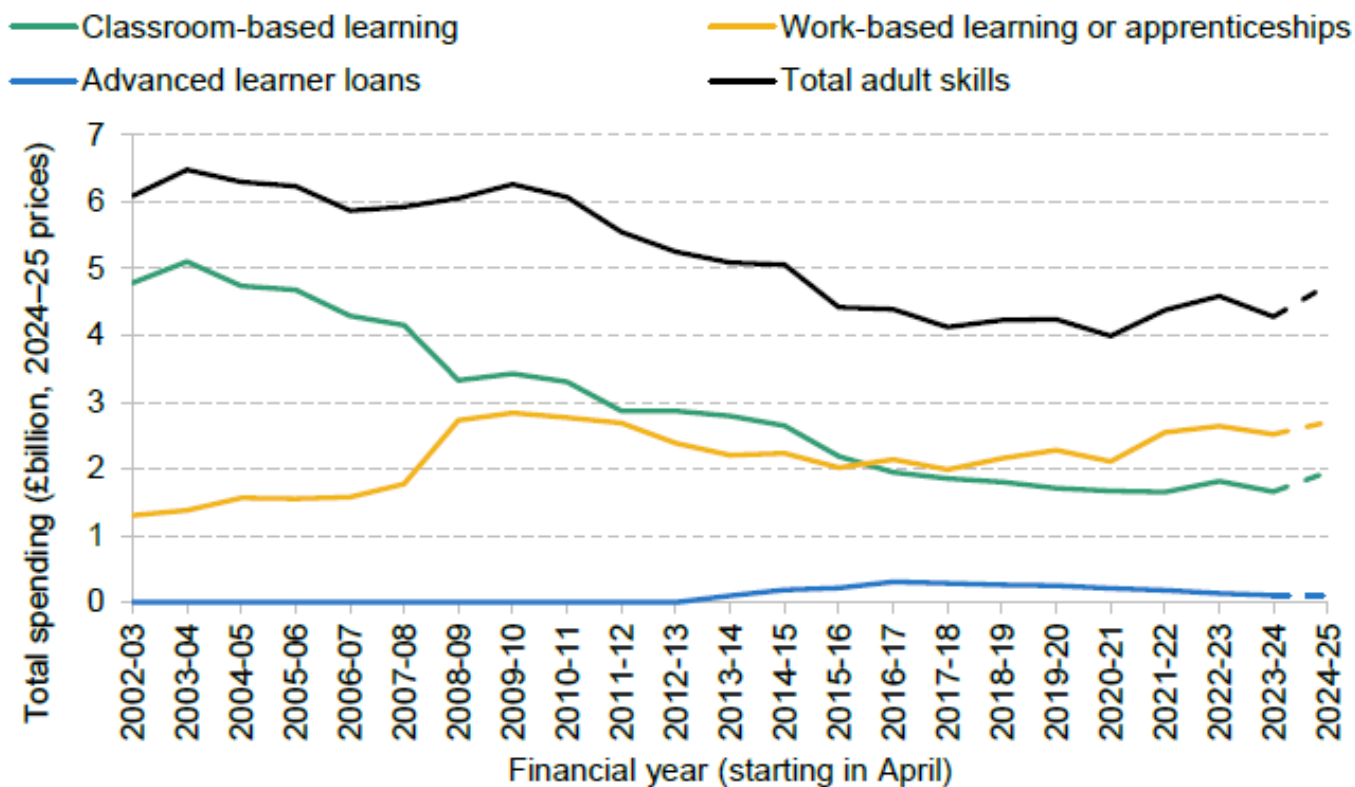
### **Public funding for classroom-based learning**

There have been large and sustained reductions to public spending on classroom-based learning over time,

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Graphic 3. Public spending on adult education and skills (actual and projected for 2024–25)



Note: The figure for 2024–25 is a projected spending level based on spending plans announced in the 2021 spending review.

Source: See source for figure 6.4 in Drayton et al. (2022). Amount lent through advanced learner loans from Student Loans Company (2022). See also HM Treasury (2024).

which have been driven by two factors. The first is a sharp fall in the number of adults enrolling in classroom-based further education courses. As shown in Figure 4.7, the number of publicly funded qualifications taken by adults in England dropped from 5.6 million in 2004–05 to just 2.3 million in 2023–24 – a reduction of 58%. While participation has declined across all qualification levels, the steepest drop occurred at the lowest levels (below level 2) during the 2000s.

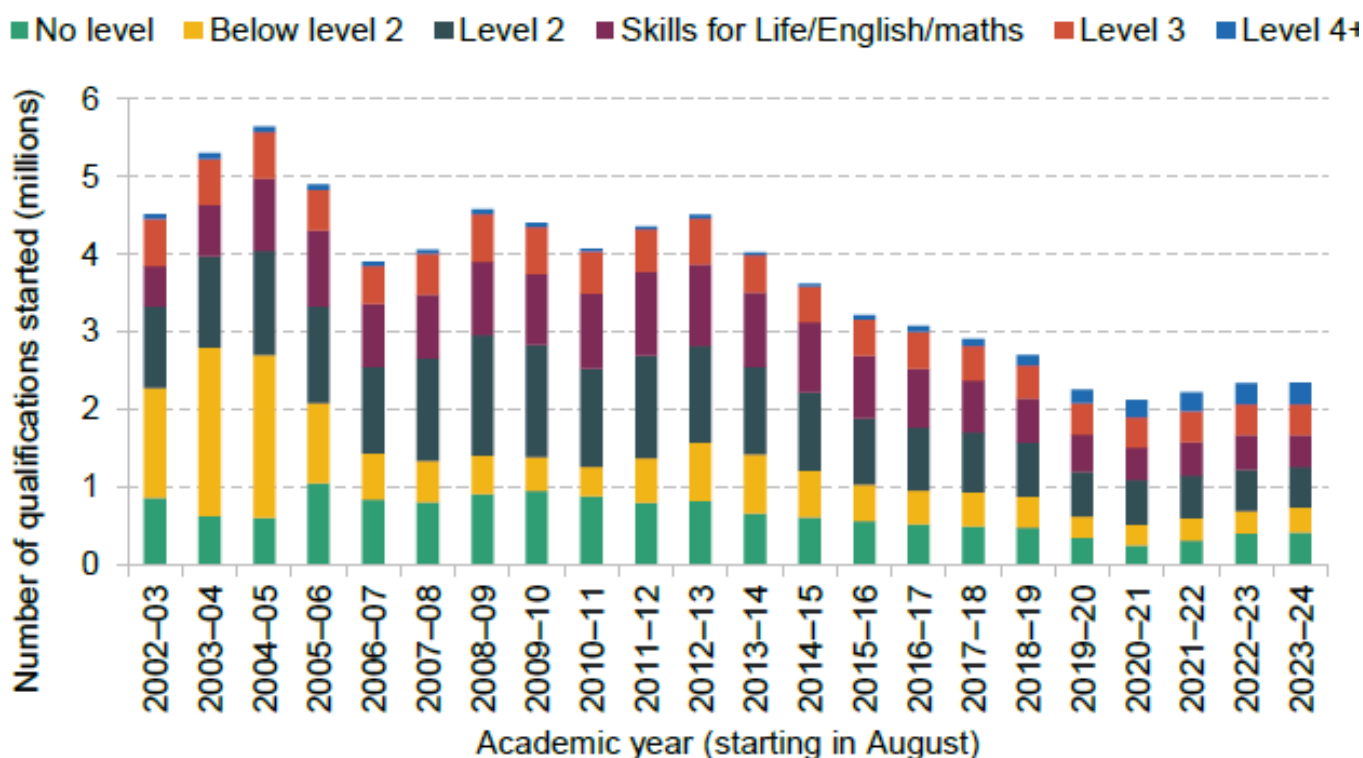
The reduction in participation in classroom-based learning has had a direct impact on funding for colleges and education providers, as funding is largely determined by the number of courses delivered. The fall in the number of classroom-based learners can be traced to several policy decisions, including the withdrawal of public funding for low-level qualifications during the 2000s, a deliberate shift in focus from classroom-based education to apprenticeship training, and tightening of eligibility criteria for funding entitlements introduced in the 2010s. While a substantial decline in the number of adult learners may seem like an inherently undesirable trend, the implications depend on which courses have declined. There is variation in the value of different further education qualifications for learners, with many low-level classroom-based courses offering limited labour market returns (Tahir, 2023).

The second driver of the fall in public funding for classroom-based learning is the large real terms reduction in funding rates for these courses. The funding that further education providers receive for teaching a learner is determined by a formula that includes the course funding rate, a disadvantage uplift and an area cost uplift (to account for higher costs in specific regions). Since 2013–14, the Education and

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Graphic 4. Participation in classroom-based further education qualifications by adults (19+) in England



Note: Level 2 corresponds to GCSE or equivalent. Skills for Life encompasses everyday literacy and numeracy courses. Level 3 corresponds to A level or equivalent qualifications. Level 4+ corresponds to higher-level qualifications such as Higher National Certificates or Higher National Diplomas.

Source: Learner numbers from 2002-03 to 2018-19 from figure 2.2 in Sibieta, Tahir and Waltmann (2021). Learner numbers for 2019-20 to 2023-24 calculated from Department for Education apprenticeship statistics (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships>) and adult further education participation statistics (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-and-skills>).

Skills Funding Agency (formerly the Skills Funding Agency) has used the following formula to allocate funding through the Adult Education Budget (AEB): Funding received for teaching a learner = Course funding rate × Disadvantage uplift × Area cost uplift.

The course funding rate, which is based on the number of guided learning hours and the course subject area, is the key component in this formula. Between 2013-14 and 2023-24, the funding rate for most adult education courses remained fixed in cash terms. Over this period, inflation eroded the value of these rates by nearly 25% in real terms (Drayton et al., 2023). Although the previous government applied a 2.2% increase to the final earnings for formula-funded provision under the AEB in both 2022-23 and 2023-24, this small adjustment did not offset the prolonged cash-terms freeze. Freezing rates for a decade has likely led to funding becoming detached from the actual resource needs of education providers, eroding their capacity in an unpredictable and arbitrary way.

For the 2024-25 academic year, the previous government introduced new funding rates. Under this system, courses are grouped into five funding bands, each with a fixed hourly rate ranging from £6 an hour to £12 an hour. This new structure should lead to increases in funding rates for most courses and simplifies the funding schedule by eliminating cliff edges present in the current system.

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*(Continued from page 23.)*

The previous funding structure resulted in widely varying hourly funding rates across courses, whereas the new funding structure establishes a consistent hourly rate. This is a positive development, as it simplifies the funding system, making it easier to understand, and reduces potential distortions in the length of courses. The overall impact on funding levels will depend on the length of courses and subject area. For 'Preparation for work and life' courses, which attract the lowest base funding rate, the changes may result in small increases or even decreases in hourly funding rates. In contrast, other subject areas, such as 'Health, public services and care', have seen more substantial increases in their base rates, resulting in higher hourly funding levels across all course lengths.

### **Public funding for apprenticeships**

Employers receive public subsidies to offset the cost of apprenticeship training. Since 2017, these subsidies have been financed through the apprenticeship levy, which requires businesses with annual pay bills exceeding £3 million to contribute 0.5% of their payroll above this threshold. These contributions are then topped up by 10% in public funding and can be used by firms to cover apprenticeship training costs. For non-levy-paying firms, there is a generous public funding system where employers pay only 5% of the training costs, with the remaining 95% covered by the Government.

The Government has announced that it will replace the existing apprenticeship levy with a growth and skills levy, which would give firms flexibility to use their levy contributions for specified forms of non-apprenticeship training as well as shorter apprenticeships (i.e. apprenticeships that last less than a year). [5] The types of training eligible for funding will be determined by Skills England, a newly established body tasked with identifying the skill needs of the country. In principle, providing greater flexibility should help employers to invest in additional training that they and their employees find valuable. But the history of these wider training subsidies, such as the former Train to Gain programme, suggests that the result is often that much of the spending goes on training that firms would have provided – and paid for – even without the subsidy. In determining the list of eligible training, Skills England must ensure that subsidised training is likely to be additional and genuinely productive.

As part of reforms to the apprenticeship levy, the government also plans to remove some level 7 apprenticeships (the highest level of apprenticeships) from the scope of levy funding. Graphic 5 below presents the share of the apprenticeship budget allocated to apprenticeships by level. The proportion of funding directed to higher-level apprenticeships (level 4 and above) has trebled between 2017–18 and 2021–22 from 13% to 39%. There has been an especially sharp rise in level 7 apprenticeship spending from 1% in 2017–18 to 10% by 2021–22. These apprenticeships are predominantly taken by older adults who already hold degrees, with nearly 70% of higher apprenticeship starts by individuals aged 25 and over.

The exclusion of certain level 7 apprenticeships is intended to redirect funding towards younger, less-skilled apprenticeships. While restricting subsidy funding is likely to reduce the demand for level 7 apprenticeships, it does not address the underlying costs businesses incur when hiring and training apprentices at lower levels. For many employers, these costs will remain a significant barrier to taking on younger apprentices, particularly those who require more support and training. As a result, this policy may have limited impact on achieving its broader goal of incentivising businesses to hire younger apprentices.

### **Further education loans**

The Government provides access to loans for further education courses through advanced learner loans. These represent a tiny fraction of public outlay on student loans: in 2023–24, the amount lent through advanced learner loans (£101 million) was less than 1% of the amount lent through higher education loans (£20.1 billion), and the amount lent through further education loans has shrunk over time. The previous government announced that the system of further education loans is set to be reformed through the introduction of the new LLE.

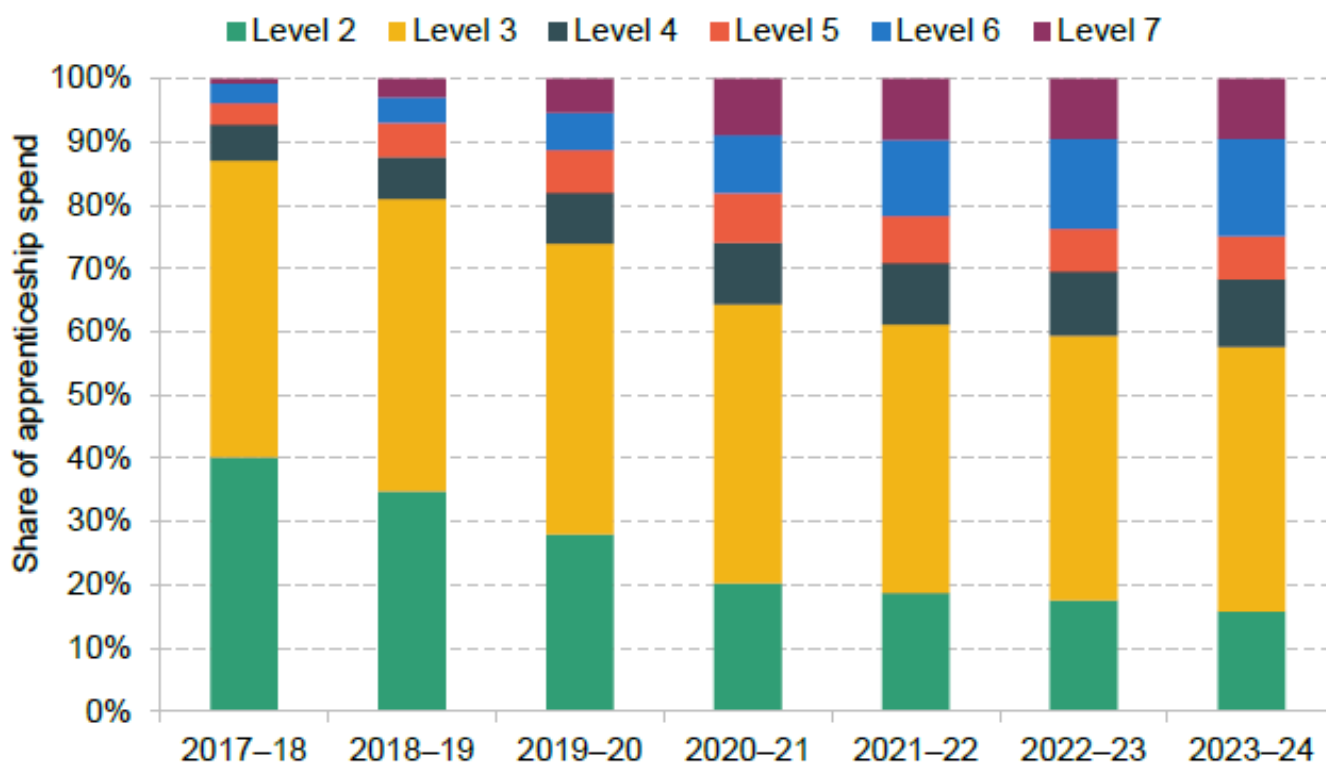
The LLE is best thought of as a package of three reforms to the existing post-18 loan system. First, it will unify the two existing post-18 loans systems, with learners studying further education courses being offered maintenance loans like their counterparts studying at university. Second, the LLE will introduce

*(Continued on page 25.)*



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Graphic 5. Share of apprenticeship budget spent on each apprenticeship level



Source: Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

‘modular funding’, which will allow learners to access loans for specific modules and short courses rather than just entire courses. Third, the LLE will remove existing restrictions on accessing loan funding known as ‘equivalent and lower qualification’ rules. [6]

The current government has confirmed its commitment to the LLE but has delayed its launch. Initially scheduled to begin funding course enrolments from January 2026, the LLE’s rollout has now been pushed back to January 2027. This continues a pattern of delays since the policy was first announced in 2023, and significant questions about its design remain unanswered, such as the courses that will be eligible for LLE funding. It is essential that the current government addresses these uncertainties and provides a clear implementation roadmap as soon as possible.

### Concluding summary

Since 2010, there have been significant cuts to funding for young people in colleges and sixth forms, with recent funding increases falling short of reversing these declines. Although there have been improvements since 2017, college finances remain in a precarious state, with nearly one in five rated as financially vulnerable by the industry regulator. Recruitment and retention challenges add to these pressures, with average teacher pay in colleges around 15% lower than in schools, which is likely to contribute to ongoing recruitment and retention challenges.

Total spending on adult skills remains about 23% lower in real terms than in 2010. This decline is primarily due to significant reductions in classroom-based adult education, which has seen enrolment fall by 60%. Spending on apprenticeships has been more protected, although it is increasingly concentrated on higher-level apprenticeships, raising questions about the opportunities available to younger and less-skilled learners.

Looking ahead to the 2025 spending review, rising student numbers will intensify pressures. To

(Continued on page 26.)

*(Continued from page 25.)*

maintain spending per student in real terms between 2025 and 2027, the government would need to allocate an additional £200 million in today's prices. At the same time, ongoing reforms, such as the introduction of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and changes to the apprenticeship levy, add further complexity to an already stretched system. With the public finances under significant strain, finding additional resources for colleges, sixth forms and other FE providers will be a substantial challenge.

### **Foot notes**

[1] See *FE Week*, 'Sixth form college teachers add 4 more days of strike action', <https://feweek.co.uk/sixth-formcollege-teachers-add-4-more-days-of-strike-action/>.

[2] See 'AoC pay recommendation 2024/25', <https://www.aoc.co.uk/news-campaigns-parliament/aoc-newsroom/aocpay-recommendation-2024-25>.

[3] 16 See *FE Week*, 'Revealed: Level 3 quals saved from the chop... for now', <https://feweek.co.uk/revealed-level-3-quals-saved-from-the-chop-for-now/>.

[4] See 'Public Spending: Inheritance', Volume 752: debated on Monday 29 July 2024, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-07-29/debates/45E1221B-F210-4132-8A8E-711B96F4D503/PublicSpendingInheritance>.

[5] See Press release 'Prime Minister overhauls apprenticeships to support opportunity', <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-overhauls-apprenticeships-to-support-opportunity>.

[6] These rules prevent most students from receiving student finance for a qualification at the same or lower level to one they hold. Their removal could, for example, allow a student to study a level 6 qualification (e.g. a first degree in history), but then receive funding to return to a college or university to study a level 4 qualification (e.g. a Diploma in electrical engineering).

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**All graphics are courtesy of the IFS.**

# Significant rise in mental health admissions for young people in last decade

**T**here had been a 65% increase in the number of children and young people being admitted to general acute medical wards in hospitals in England because of a mental health concern between 2012 and 2022, according a study led by UCL researchers. The study, published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* journal and funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and the NIHR Great Ormond Street Hospital Biomedical Research Centre (NIHR GOSH BRC), analysed data on all admissions of five- to 18-year-olds to medical wards in England from April 1st 2012 to March 31st 2022.

General acute medical wards were specialised hospital wards designed to provide rapid assessment, treatment, and care for patients. The units served as a bridge between the emergency department, general practitioners, and other hospital wards and they were separate to specialised mental health wards such as eating disorder units.

Children and young people were most commonly admitted to general wards from Accident and Emergency because they were too unwell, or it had been not safe for them to go home. The researchers found that over the course of 10 years, mental health admissions had increased from 24,198 to 39,925 (a 65% increase), in comparison to just a 10.1% increase in all cause admissions, which had risen from 311,067 to 342,511. Increases in admissions had been greatest among girls aged 11-15, which had risen from 9,091 to 19,349 (112.8% increase), and for eating disorders, which had risen from 478 to 2,938 (514.6% increase). This study had been the first to analyse national trends in mental health admissions of children and young people to acute medical wards, as the study had looked at admissions of up to 18 years of age, and the acute medical wards included both children's wards and adult wards.

Senior author, Dr Lee Hudson (UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health and Great Ormond Street Hospital) said that over the past decade, the researchers had observed a significant rise in mental health admissions among children and young people to acute medical wards. He pointed out that although there had been attention paid to increased referrals to community mental health services and inpatient mental health settings, admissions to general acute medical settings felt like a piece of the jigsaw missing in the story. Dr Hudson said that acute medical wards were important places for caring for young people with mental health concerns, especially those with co-existing physical health problems like starvation from an eating disorder. However, he said that the increased intensity presented challenges for acute wards, for patients and their families and the staff supporting them.

Dr Hudson pointed out that they may not be set up with an appropriate ward environment, and sometimes staff working there needed more training and support with relevant skills. He therefore called for better co-working between physical and mental health professionals across hospital and community teams, including, for example, adequate provision of psychiatrists and mental health trained nurses to support physical medical care on the actual ward.

The researchers had been unable to pinpoint the reasons behind the dramatic increase in mental health admissions in their study from the national level data, but they were in the process of collating more detailed data on reasons for admissions from a selection of children's wards in England, alongside interviewing young people, their families and staff working on wards. From this, they hope to better understand the needs and problems for the admissions to guide appropriate and effective interventions and improvements. Dr Hudson said that he and his colleagues were all currently grappling with and trying to figure out why more and more young people were suffering with their mental health. But he suggested that it was likely the bigger background prevalence of mental health problems, and possibly increased severity of individual cases, which had led to increased presentations to hospitals that required an emergency admission to a general ward because it not been safe for the patient to go home. Dr Hudson said that the findings had also showed that the increases were not solely down to the COVID-19 pandemic, as there had been year on year increases in numbers of admissions since 2012, which had been an issue that appeared to now be core business for acute wards, and as it was not going to go away, a focus on improving care was essential.

## Is AI in Schools now Centre Stage?

By John Bangs

Distinguished Associate at Education International and former Head of Education at the NUT

**T**wo events happened last week which pointed to a major shift in the relationship of AI to schools. The first was Bridget Phillipson's lightly reported landmark speech on digital education at the Bett show. The second was the publication of the report of the International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) which took place in Singapore last April - and is significant because it's the only international forum where teacher union leaders and Education Ministers meet to consider next steps in education policy.

So, to the Education Secretary's speech. She argued that AI was a radical force for good in Education. She announced that the technology firms including Google and Microsoft had developed an AI Product Safety Expectations in Education framework which sets out safeguards for making AI tools safe for classroom use including child centred design and enhanced filtering of harmful content.

She also announced that the Chartered College of Teaching would lead the development of teacher training on AI use, including a major focus on how AI can support children with SEN.

These are all considerable, and welcome, policy developments, which prompted me to reflect on the ISTP 2024. At its core was a discussion on the role of technology - particularly AI-in transforming education and vocational education. Nineteen countries attended the ISTP with Australia, the US, Canada, China, New Zealand, Singapore and the US making up the non - European contingent. (The UK's lack of representation was because SpAds blocked their own Minister from attending his final outing!) Everyone in the ISTP recognised that AI represented a key "inflection point in humanity's development" and that a core principle must be that digital literacy should be seen as "human decision making guided by ethical and moral responsibility".

Particularly lively was the discussion on whether it was too late to regulate AI use, whether digital technology itself was neutral or whether it was shaped by company profit imperatives, and whether equal access could be achieved. While there was agreement that kinaesthetic learning continued to be essential, some European countries were concerned about traditional forms of learning disappearing, for example, the use of books, while Singapore led the charge arguing that "education needed to get its hands dirty" by partnering with tech companies to ensure AI was enhanced effectively for education.

Significantly, there was agreement that teachers not only needed professional development, but they should be "active players" and "trusted partners" in the development of digital technology. I'll return to the ISTP report in future columns in *Education Journal*, but the significance of Phillipson's Bett speech was that it connected, albeit unwittingly, to the Summit's discussions on AI. While she appears to have taken the same approach as the Summit on AI's use in education, what's missing is its commitment to recognising that teachers must be centre stage in developing digital learning and AI, as well as receiving training.

There's a welcome rumour that UK's education ministers will attend this year's ISTP in Reykjavik. One slated discussion will be on the use of the OECD's and Education International's *Opportunities, Guidelines and Guardrails for the Effective and Equitable Use of AI in Education* (2023) which does indeed argue that, for AI to be successful, teachers must be in the forefront of its development.

[www.istp2025.is/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-ISTP-Report.pdf](http://www.istp2025.is/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-ISTP-Report.pdf)



*John Bangs*

# Accepting finitude is the natural path to ... infinity!

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

Formally Professor of Brain and Technology, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, Netherlands

I have been retired for a few weeks now. The first series of columns I'm writing is about the *Whirling Dust '24* project. It's about reliving and working on the new, expanded and edited version of the album I released on vinyl in 1983 with my band (Jim Rensson and the Crew). I was the singer of the band and wrote both the lyrics and the music. Last week I described the song "Funeral's Wedding Day," which describes the transition from one stage of life to another as the birth — the wedding — of who you will become at the funeral of who you were. That was the case in 1983, when I exchanged my student days for a job as a music teacher, and it is still the case when I exchanged my professorship for my retirement..

This week the song New Order. When I wrote this song over 40 years ago, it was about embracing life and love, which I saw as a wonderful wealth, in a world that was becoming increasingly mechanized. Increasingly, as consumers, we became part of economic/technocratic machinations, which increasingly suppressed ecology and human dignity. How can you keep hope, and embrace the beautiful phenomenon that is life, while you see that technocracy suffocates all of it? When I started the *Whirling Dust '24* project during my burn-out last year, I almost lost my eye for the beauty of nature, life and the spiritual! Just like 40 years ago, I now turn away from the populist call for even more technology and innovation ('New Order'), out of awe for the beauty of life!

It is striking that just before my burnout I actually still looked at the ever expanding and suffocating system order in the same way as I did then, in 1983. Now I see that this is a somewhat one-sided way of looking at things. Yes, this order exists and it destroys a lot. However, it is a consequence of the in itself completely understandable fact that we as self-conscious beings cannot accept our suffering and ultimately also our finitude. We have the need to build safety and protection around us, and we are able to give that shape technologically: making coats, controlling fire, building huts, etc. In this way we can certainly postpone our finitude a little. But in the meantime, we are becoming less and less accepting of our mortality and are sacrificing much of our natural environment – Mother Nature – to our artificial environment, including cement, plastic, asphalt, copper and fiberglass. As a result, the human-made mass on our planet now exceeds the mass of all life on the planet combined.

The remarkable thing now is that nature in its (relative) infinity gives us (relatively) finite lives, while in our striving to keep evil, especially finitude, at bay, we have increasingly sacrificed infinite nature. If you look closely, we are getting better and better at it, we seem to be able to get a little older each time, and there are always more treatment options for threats to our health and safety. However, now that I have woken up from my burnout, I see so much more clearly that we are infinite precisely in our finitude, that there is hope and perspective, precisely if we dare to leave the duality, or rather dialectic of 0 and 1.... Out of infinite nature arise our temporary lives, in an eternal circle of life. So life cannot exist without Mother Nature, and technocracy and Mother Nature are at odds. The paradox is that artificially extending our lives does not bring us closer to infinity, but rather endangers the infinity from which we were born. Accepting finitude is the natural path to ... infinity!

***"I see so much more clearly that we are infinite precisely in our finitude, that there is hope and perspective, precisely if we dare to leave the duality, or rather dialectic of 0 and 1.... Out of infinite nature arise our temporary lives, in an eternal circle of life. So life cannot exist without Mother Nature, and technocracy and Mother Nature are at odds."***

# Data: The Key to Successful Student Outcomes

By Dominic Gore  
Senior Director, Anthology

**T**he importance of data for universities cannot be overstated, as it provides the foundation for a wide range of actionable insights that impact every facet of the learning experience. For instance, data can be used to predict students at risk of dropping out or to refine the curriculum for students facing academic difficulties. By identifying potential roadblocks early, universities can intervene before problems escalate.

There are five critical types of data that higher education institutions should look to analyse.

- **Academic Engagement Data:** This includes information such as attendance, grades and general participation. Access to this data allows staff to identify students needing additional support.
- **Student Characteristics:** Data on age, gender, background, and disabilities are vital for understanding the demographic and socio-economic context of the student body and assessing the success of access schemes.
- **Faculty/Staff Observations and Reported Alerts:** Direct observation and past reports allow staff to track emerging issues and safeguard concerns.
- **Non-Cognitive Data:** This data captures students' attitudes, motivations, and social-emotional skills and can be used to create personalised support plans.
- **Co-Curricular Involvement Data:** This data can include records of a student's non-academic activities, such as volunteering and social activities, building a fuller picture of a student's academic journey and their level of general engagement.

We spoke to higher education professionals and found that 45% see academic engagement data as the most crucial they have access to, with 39% highlighting the importance of data on student characteristics. However, all these data types are essential if universities are to have a comprehensive understanding of each student's academic journey.

Many institutions face significant barriers when leveraging data. Different departments, whether admissions, student services, or academic departments, often operate in isolation, making creating a unified data strategy challenging. This creates information siloes that can restrict access to data, making it highly challenging for staff to have a holistic view of any one student's progress. Outdated technology systems and paper records can compound this problem, allowing critical information to fall through the cracks.

To access the benefits of a successful data strategy, higher education institutions must begin by assessing their current data infrastructure, identifying key gaps, and creating a culture that encourages data-driven decision-making. Comprehensive training and development programmes for advisors and staff ensure they can effectively use data to support students.

While the benefits of data are significant, challenges do exist. Institutions must also address data privacy and security concerns to protect sensitive student and staff information. Robust technological solutions are also required. Once institutions have a comprehensive understanding of their ecosystem, they should implement a holistic data analytics platform that incorporates data points from across departments and technology systems. Predictive AI can be used to analyse learning patterns and offer adaptive content, allowing for more personalised instruction and timely interventions when necessary.

Data is an invaluable asset for higher education institutions, and prioritising its management and use can significantly enhance student support efforts. By doing so, institutions can ensure timely interventions, personalised support, and a holistic approach to student development, ultimately leading to improved retention and overall student success.

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# Accountability, Assessment, & Inspection Report

**A** report published by the Education Policy Institute (EPI), *Reforming Accountability*, revealed the flaws of the current accountability system and it called for a fairer and more holistic approach to measuring school effectiveness. The paper highlighted that current performance measures can provide a disincentive to schools being inclusive for all pupils. However, inflexible systems that do not recognise and adjust for the high level of additional needed amongst some pupils were incompatible with an education system that worked for all.

The report's findings included:

- Accountability measures are making situations more difficult for schools in the most challenging areas. Around one-in-three of the most disadvantaged schools were labelled as “well below average” by the Department for Education (DfE) on the key measure of secondary school performance (Progress 8), compared with just one-in-fifty of the least disadvantaged. Being labelled as underperforming can make it more difficult for a school to improve.
- Parents and carers are not well served by an accountability system that remains focussed on individual schools. While Ofsted reports comment on the efficacy of individual schools in relation to quality of education and leadership and management, the reality was that decisions on financial management, workforce deployment, and the curriculum offer were currently often taken at trust level rather than in individual academies.

The EPI report argued that the Government should press ahead with its report card to give a wider view of school performance. EPI had published an updated online benchmarking tool as a blueprint for the new report card. The interactive tool allows the direct comparison of individual academy trusts, local authorities, and other groups, providing empirical data on academic attainment and progress; pupil inclusion; and workforce and financial management. EPI also recommended that:

- The Government should consider how to reflect children and young people's wellbeing, as there were no current measures of pupil wellbeing available in centrally collected data. The #BeeWell annual survey of pupil wellbeing had been in operation in Greater Manchester since 2021, and more recently across Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and Southampton and is an example of how the data could be collected more widely.

***“The EPI report argued that the Government should press ahead with its report card to give a wider view of school performance. EPI had published an updated online benchmarking tool as a blueprint for the new report card. The interactive tool allows the direct comparison of individual academy trusts, local authorities, and other groups, providing empirical data on academic attainment and progress; pupil inclusion; and workforce and financial management.”***

*(Continued on page 33.)*



*(Continued from page 32.)*

- The Government and Ofsted should implement plans for MAT inspection but in consultation with the sector and building in acknowledgement of different size and scale of MATs.
- Ofsted's role should focus on assessing the quality of teaching and learning, and a broad and balanced curriculum, rather than on those areas which can be better served by more frequent empirical data. The emphasis on inclusion in the new framework should be the extent to which the curriculum and teaching was flexible to the needs of all pupils, in particular those with special educational needs. To maintain its independence, Ofsted should not have a role in school improvement.
- Ofsted should separate safeguarding from other elements of the accountability system. The high-stakes nature of inspection may also have the unintended consequence of incentivising people to "hide" issues rather than acknowledge them and seek help. The nature of safeguarding risks is constantly evolving, and all schools require regular training and feedback.

Commenting on Reforming Accountability, from the Education Policy Institute, Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the National Education Union, said that the NEU agreed that school accountability was in need of urgent reform, and he argued that it would be essential that the Government understood how the system had worked against inclusion and it had made improvement more difficult for those schools in the most disadvantaged areas. But Mr Kebede said that there was an opportunity with forthcoming Government reforms to accountability, for a different approach and an inspection system that was supportive, effective, and fair.

#### **A blunt tool**

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of NAHT, said that there was no doubt that current performance measures were a blunt tool and they failed to paint a fair and accurate picture of school effectiveness. He argued that simplistic tools that compared school to school performance were unhelpful and at worse, misleading.

Mr Whiteman said that while a new approach would certainly be welcome, the sector should be careful not to assume that there was some form of data "holy grail" out there, and data was only ever one part of the picture and should never be looked at in isolation. He said that the NAHT did not support attempts to come up with measures for "wellbeing" at school level as there was far too much influencing wellbeing which was beyond a school's control. Mr Whiteman added that while well-intended, such a measure was fraught with dangers and the unintended consequences were significant.

He argued that the Government's decision to move away from crude single-word Ofsted judgements had laid the foundations for a move to a more reliable, nuanced inspection system. Mr Whiteman said that as the inspectorate was due to publish and consult upon its plans for reforms shortly, the hope was that it had grasped the nettle and would propose the fundamentally different regime that was so desperately needed. But he added that it must be willing to listen to feedback and deliver wide-ranging changes which delivered a fairer, more reliable and humane system of accountability which would truly take into account the circumstances of each school.

***"Paul Whiteman, general secretary NAHT, said that there was no doubt that current performance measures were a blunt tool and they failed to paint a fair and accurate picture of school effectiveness. He argued that simplistic tools that compared school to school performance were unhelpful and at worse, misleading."***

## Policy papers published last week

### *The Office for Students: Proposed strategy and decision to pause applications*

**Author:** Martin Beck.

**Source:** House of Lords Library.

**Document type:** In focus briefing.

**Published:** Friday 24 January 2025.

**Reference:** -.

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Details:** The Office for Students (OfS) strategy for 2025 to 2030 establishes priorities in the areas of quality, student experience, and sector resilience. The OfS is currently pausing aspects of its regulatory functions to focus on financial sustainability among education providers. This action is supported by the government. However, critics argue the OfS's decision will cause financial difficulties to some education providers and leave some students without the protection of the regulator.

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/the-office-for-students-proposed-strategy-and-decision-to-pause-applications/>

### *Academy schools: Government plans for change*

**Author:** Claire Broder.

**Source:** House of Lords Library.

**Document type:** In Focus briefing.

**Published:** Monday 20 January 2025.

**Reference:** -.

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Details:** The number of academy schools has increased significantly since 2010. In England, 43.5% of all schools were academies in the 2023/24 academic year. The government has announced plans to change the rules academy schools must follow. Some of these changes are set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/academy-schools-government-plans-for-change/>

### *Duties to report child abuse in England*

**Author:** David Foster.

**Source:** House of Commons Library.

**Document type:** Research briefing.

**Published:** Friday 24 January 2025.

**Reference:** SN 06793.

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Details:** A briefing on reporting child abuse in England, including the government's plans to introduce a mandatory reporting duty.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06793/>

### *Technical education in England: T Levels*

**Authors:** Joe Lewis and Paul Bolton.

**Source:** House of Commons Library.

**Document type:** Research briefing.

**Published:** Wednesday 22 January 2025.

**Reference:** CBP 7951.

*(Continued on page 35.)*

*(Continued from page 34.)*

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Details:** This briefing provides an overview of reforms to the technical education system in England through the introduction of new T Level qualifications.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7951/>

### ***The Review of Level 3 Qualifications Reform***

**Author:** Joe Lewis.

**Source:** House of Commons Library.

**Document type:** Research briefing.

**Published:** Tuesday 21 January 2025.

**Reference:** CBP 10175.

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Details:** This briefing provides background to the government's review of level 3 qualifications reform. It explains the review's outcomes and includes reaction.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10175/>

### ***Youth unemployment statistics***

**Authors:** Brigid Francis-Devine, Andy Powell and Annalise Murray.

**Source:** House of Commons Library.

**Document type:** Research briefing.

**Published:** Tuesday 21 January 2025.

**Reference:** SN 05871.

**Geographical coverage:** United Kingdom and OECD member states.

**Details:** This briefing presents the latest statistics on youth unemployment in the UK as well as comparisons with other OECD countries.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn05871/>

## Consultations published last week

There were no education consultations or consultation outcomes published since 1 January.

## Written ministerial statements published last week

Statements on education first made in the House of Commons are under headings in green. Those first made in the House of Lords are under headings in red. The following statements were published over the last two weeks.

### House of Commons

#### Department for Education

##### Higher Education Student Support

###### **The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson): [HCWS372]**

The Government announced on 4 November a significant package of measures to support students and stabilise the university sector.

We need to put our world-leading higher education sector on a secure footing in order to face the challenges of the next decade. Maximum fees for the 2025/26 academic year will increase by forecast inflation, 3.1%, providing additional financial help for higher education providers after seven years of frozen fees which has resulted in their value falling by an estimated 28%.

The 3.1% increase to maximum fees for 2025/26 will help cement higher education providers' roles as engines of growth in the heart of communities across the country and will mean they can continue to deliver high quality education that boosts the life chances of those who choose this path.

Maximum tuition fees for a standard full-time course and the subsidised up-front loans available to students to pay their tuition will be increased by 3.1% to £9,535 for a standard full-time course; to £11,440 for a full-time accelerated course and to £7,145 for a part-time course for the 2025/26 academic year. The increase in maximum tuition fees for 2025/26 applies to new and continuing students, however higher education providers are autonomous and responsible for setting their own fees up to the maximum amounts.

In deciding whether or not to increase fees, providers will want to ensure that they can continue to deliver courses which are fit for purpose and help students achieve their ambitions. For continuing students, providers will also depend on their individual contracts with students, and providers will wish to make their own legal assessment of contracts when considering fee increases.

From the start of the 2025/26 academic year, a lower maximum fee limit of £5,760 is being introduced for foundation years in classroom-based subjects. A lower tuition fee loan limit of £5,760 is also being introduced to match the new tuition fee limit. We recognise the important role that foundation years play in promoting access to higher education, but we believe they can be delivered more efficiently, at lower costs to students.

Students will receive additional support for their living costs in 2025/26, with the largest cash increases for students from low-income families. This approach ensures that the most support is targeted at the poorest students, while keeping the student finance system financially sustainable. Maximum undergraduate loans for living costs will be increased by forecast inflation, 3.1%, in 2025/26 with as much as £414 additional support for students on the lowest incomes who need the most help. I am also announcing today further changes to student support for the 2025/26 academic year that will benefit students.

Maximum disabled students' allowance for students with disabilities undertaking full-time and part-

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time undergraduate courses in 2025/26 will increase by 3.1%. Maximum grants for students with child or adult dependants who are attending full-time undergraduate courses will also increase by 3.1% in 2025/26. We are also increasing support for students undertaking postgraduate courses in 2025/26. Maximum loans for students starting master's degree and doctoral degree courses from 1 August 2025 onwards will be increased by 3.1% in 2025/26. And the same increase will apply to the maximum disabled students' allowance for postgraduate students with disabilities in 2025/26.

Bereaved partners and children of Gurkhas and Hong Kong military veterans discharged before 1997 who have been granted indefinite leave to enter or indefinite leave to remain will not be subject to the 3-year ordinary residence requirement but will instead need to be ordinarily resident in England on the course start date to qualify for student support and home fee status. This change is being introduced as these students may find it difficult to meet the normal ordinary residence requirements for student support and home fee status.

We will expect the higher education sector to demonstrate that, in return for the increased investment that we are asking students to make, they deliver the very best outcomes both for those students and for the country.

We have set out our five priorities for reform of the higher education system and will work in partnership with the sector over the coming months to shape the changes to government policy that will be needed to support this reform. We will expect our higher education providers to:

- Play a stronger role in expanding access and improving outcomes for disadvantaged students.
- Make a stronger contribution to economic growth.
- Play a greater civic role in their communities.
- Raise the bar further on teaching standards, to maintain and improve our worldleading reputation and drive out poor practice.
- Drive a sustained efficiency and reform programme.

We will then set out this government's plan for higher education reform by this summer.

Looking forward to the 2026/27 academic year, the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will deliver transformational change to the current student finance system by broadening access to high-quality, flexible education and training. The LLE will launch in 2026/27 for courses starting from January 2027.

Further details of the student support package for 2025/26 are set out in the attached document - 'Higher Education Fees and Student Support for 2025/26: Details'

I have laid regulations implementing changes to maximum fees for undergraduates in 2025/26 on 20 January.

Alongside the regulations, we are publishing impact assessments on the changes to maximum fees for 2025/26 which draw on the Office for Students' independent analysis of the wider financial pressures facing the higher education sector as well as an Equality Impact Assessment of changes to fees and student support for 2025/26.

I also plan to lay further regulations implementing changes to student support for undergraduates and postgraduates for 2025/26 in February. Regulations are subject to Parliamentary procedure.

Attachments:

1. Details of HE student support and Fees [Higher Education Fees and Student Support for 2025-26.pdf]

Monday 20 January 2025

## House of Lords

**There were no written statements on education published last week.**

## Statutory instruments issued last week

### *The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2025*

**Year and number:** 2025/42.

**Enabling power:** the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, sections 45(1B), 45A, 45AA, 47, 47ZA, 47A, (4B) and (5), 48(1) and (2), 49(2) and (2A), and 138A and paragraphs 1) and 2B of Schedule 14; and the Education Act 2002, section 24(3) and (4).

**Made:** 16.1.25.

**Laid:** 20.1.25.

**Issued:** 20.1.25.

**Published:** 21.1.25.

**Coming into force:** 17.2.25.

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Classification:** General.

**Price of print edition:** £14.93. (Electronic edition is free.)

**ISBN:** 9780348268010.

**Details:** These Regulations make provision for local authorities' financial arrangements in relation to the funding of maintained schools and providers of funded early years provision in England, for the financial year 2025-2026.

Part 1 revokes the School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2023 (S.I. 2023/59) with effect from 1st April 2025 (regulation 2). The School and Early Years Finance and Childcare (Provision of Information About Young Children) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2024 (S.I. 2024/66) ("the 2024 Regulations") remain in force. Regulation 3 amends references to the 2024 Regulations in the Schools Forums (England) Regulations 2012 (S.I. 2012/2261).

Part 2 defines the non-schools education budget (regulation 4 and Schedule 1) and sets requirements for the initial determination of the schools budget (regulation 5), which is defined in regulation 6 and Schedule 2. It lists expenditure that is excluded from the non-schools education budget and the schools budget (regulation 7) and makes provision for central expenditure and the individual schools budget (regulation 8 and Schedule 2). It further requires local authorities to determine budget shares for schools maintained by them and amounts to be allocated in respect of early years provision in their areas, in accordance with the appropriate formulae (regulations 10 and 11).

Chapter 1 of Part 3 deals with the determination of budget shares for schools. Regulations 13 and 15 to 24 make provision for specific factors that the local authority must include in their local funding formulae for certain schools. The allowable ranges for these amounts or sums are set in relation to the distance between their respective value in the national funding formula and, for all mandatory factors other than the split site factor, the value in the local authority's funding formula in the previous funding period (financial year 2024 – 2025). Regulation 25 specifies additional criteria which may, or must, be taken into account in setting budgets for certain schools. The Regulations also impose a minimum per pupil amount (regulation 27) and a minimum funding guarantee for schools (regulation 28 and Schedule 3). Regulations 29 to 31 make provision for calculation of budgets in relation to specific types of school or specific circumstances.

Chapter 2 of Part 3 deals with early years provision and requires local authorities' formulae to take into account the predicted hours of attendance (with provision for review and redetermination on the basis of information about actual hours of attendance) (regulation 32) and to include one or more social deprivation factors (regulation 33). Regulations 34 and 35 provide for additional amounts to be included in respect of children in specified circumstances (regulation 34) and disabled children (regulation 35). There is a requirement to pass 96% of funding to early years providers (regulation 37) and a 12% limit on the

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amount of funding that may be attributable to the discretionary (supplementary) part of the early years formulae (regulation 38).

Chapter 3 of Part 3 deals with the redetermination of a school's budget share where a pupil is permanently excluded or leaves (regulation 40) and where a school's non-domestic rate liability changes (regulation 41). Regulation 41 also provides for the redetermination of a school's budget share, or the amount allocated to an early years provider, in order to correct errors in previous determinations. Regulation 42 makes provision for the Secretary of State to authorise a local authority to vary its application of certain provisions in these Regulations.

There are also requirements in relation to local authorities' schemes (regulation 43 and Schedule 4).

A full impact assessment has not been produced for this instrument as no, or no significant, impact on the private, voluntary or public sector is foreseen. .

### ***The Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2025***

**Year and number:** 2025/Draft.

**Enabling power:** the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, section 119(5)(a) and (b) of, and paragraphs 2(5), 2(11), 3(4), 3(10) and 4 of Schedule 2.

**Made:** -.

**Laid:** -.

**Issued:** 20.1.25.

**Published:** 21.1.25.

**Coming into force:** 6.3.25.

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Classification:** General.

**Price of print edition:** £8.14. (Electronic edition is free.)

**ISBN:** 9780348267990.

**Details:** These Regulations amend the Higher Education (Fee Limits and Fee Limit Condition) (England) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 2018/903) ("the 2018 Regulations") and the Higher Education (Fee Limits for Accelerated Courses) (England) Regulations 2019 (S.I. 2019/214) ("the 2019 Regulations"). The amendments introduce new, increased course fee limits for qualifying courses provided by certain English higher education providers, and new lower tuition fee limits for foundation years of study in certain subjects. The fee changes apply to the higher amounts of fees and the floor amounts in respect of those amounts. These expressions are defined by paragraph 2 of Schedule 2 to the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (c. 29) ("the 2017 Act"). The increases also apply to the basic amounts of fees, and the floor amounts in respect of those basic amounts. These expressions are defined by paragraph 3 of Schedule 2 to the 2017 Act. The fee increases to the higher amounts are required to maintain the value of those amounts in real terms, having regard to the index of prices specified in the Student Fees (Inflation Index) Regulations 2006 (S.I. 2006/507). Fees are increased by 3.1%.

The fee changes apply to English higher education providers which are required to limit their tuition fees by virtue of section 10 of the 2017 Act as a condition of registration with the regulator of higher education providers, the Office for Students.

Regulation 2(2) inserts new definitions for "CAH3 code", "foundation year" and "lower-fee foundation year," into the 2018 Regulations.

Regulation 2(3) makes a consequential amendment to regulation 4(1)(a).

Paragraphs (4), (5), (7), (9), (10) and (12) of regulation 2 insert new, increased limits on fees that may be charged for academic years beginning on or after 1st August 2025. The fee limits that currently apply to academic years beginning on or after 1st August 2019, but before 1st August 2025, are preserved.

Paragraphs (6) and (8) of regulation 2 insert higher amounts for lower-fee foundation year courses, and the floor amounts in respect of those amounts, into the 2018 Regulations. Paragraphs (11) and (13) specify basic amounts for lower-fee foundation year courses, and the floor amounts in respect of those

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*(Continued from page 40.)*

amounts.

Paragraph (14) of regulation 2 inserts a new Schedule into the 2018 Regulations that identifies the subjects to which the new limits for lower-fee foundation years apply and their associated CAH3 codes.

Regulation 3 makes similar amendments to the 2019 Regulations to increase the higher, floor and basic amounts for academic years beginning on or after 1st August 2025.

A full impact assessment of the effect that this instrument will have on the costs of business, the voluntary sector and the public sector has been produced and is published alongside these Regulations on [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). Hard copies are available from the Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT..

## A long day's journey.....

By Chris Waterman  
Reporting from the Public Bill Committee

**O**n Tuesday 21 January, the Public Bill Committee held two evidence sessions on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which covers the full range of the duties of the Department for Education. In the morning session, which ran from 9.25 to 11.25, the Committee heard from four sets of witnesses: Carol Homden, CEO of Coram and Anne Longfield, Executive Chair of the Center of Young Lives; Andy Smith, ADCS President and Ruth Stanier, Assistant Director of Policy at the LGA; Julie McCulloch, Senior Director of Strategy at ASCL and Paul Whiteman; General Secretary of NAHT; and Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive of CAFCASS.

All of the witnesses broadly welcomed the Bill, and in particular proposals that they had been campaigning for. Recurrent themes during the first session were: the importance of early intervention; improvements in safeguarding; the costs of residential care and the necessity of a register of children educated at home (EHE). Problems concerning children with SEND were stressed, with failure to deliver the ECHP a recurrent issue. Mandatory family group decision making was welcomed – referred to as 'magic meetings' by Anne Longfield. A key resource issue was the spending on looked after children and need to ensure that children leaving care were well-supported.

Andy Smith and Ruth Stainer were keen to stress the importance of the role of local authorities and their contribution to joined-up provision for children. There was no mention of corporate parenting, and concern about the variability of early help services between authorities. One difficulty for the EHE register was that LA provision had been 'hollowed out'. Recruitment and retention difficulty of social workers meant an over-use of agency staff.

Julie McCulloch and Andy Smith welcomed the Bill, which would deliver on many of their policy ambitions. Recruitment and retention of teachers was an issue, but the associations were clear that QTS should be the norm for teachers. Both witnesses were firm on the need for an independent pay review body, but one which should set the 'core' rather than the floor. They would also welcome the extension of free school meals to 18.

The final witness of the morning, Jacky Tiotto, only became involved with children when a court application had been issued, but she felt strongly that family involvement should be at an early stage. She pointed to the 800% increase in, since 2017 of deprivation of liberty orders, and that they should be reviewed on a regular basis. Jacky was also sure that kinship carers should be given support in taking on a role that would change the carers' lives significantly.

***“Julie McCulloch and Andy Smith welcomed the Bill, which would deliver on many of their policy ambitions. Recruitment and retention of teachers was an issue, but the associations were clear that QTS should be the norm for teachers.”***

### Second session

The second session of the day (from 2.00 pm until 6.20 pm, with breaks for divisions in the Chamber) took evidence from eight panels: the Children's Commissioner for England; Ofsted; The Children's Society, Children's Charities Coalition, and Become; Church of England and Catholic Education Service; United Learning, Harris Federation and Dixons Academies Trust; Suffolk Primary Headteachers' Association, Northern Education Trust, Confederation of School Trusts; Axiom Maths; and Child Poverty Action Group.

***(Continued on page 43.)***

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The session ended with evidence from the Catherine McKinnell, Schools Minister and Stephen Morgan, Minister for Early Years.

Dame Rachel de Souza's focus explained that while she had been involved the children's wellbeing sections of the bill with the DfE, she understood that nobody had seen the schools' section before the bill was published. She wanted to see a vision for how a vision for school improvement would involve all the partners. Her priorities were the establishment of the unique identifier system and the importance of children's voices in developing policy. She reported that the cri de coeur from SEND children was "support, support, support" to enable them to succeed. She was convinced that we absolutely need a home register. Ofsted were up next, with Martin Oliver (accompanied by Lee Owston and Yvette Stanley) being questioned about the need for teachers to have QTS, which he defended strongly. He welcomed his new powers 'absolutely' and explained that his top priority is the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. He spoke about the necessity of tackling unregistered provision but pointed to the resource implications. He was very concerned about children who had been withdrawn from school for the wrong reasons and welcomed Ofsted's greater powers

The third panel (Lyn Perry from Barnardo's, Mark Russell from the Children's Society and Katherine Sacks-Jones from Become) broadly welcomed the potentially transformational proposals in the Bill, including putting children's voices at the heart of the Bill. A measurement of children's wellbeing should be added. Schools should become a fourth statutory partner. Breakfast clubs were excellent but should be extended to secondary schools. The measures on care leavers were welcomed, to avoid the "care cliff" faced by care leavers. Concern was expressed about the 80% of care made by private providers.

The next panel (Neil Genders, CoE, and Paul Barber, RC) disagreed about the admissions cap on faith schools, with the CoE wanting to be more inclusive than the RC. The CoE was more interested in meeting the needs of the local community while the RC stressed the demands from parents for a Catholic education. The CoE raised the position of small primary schools, particularly in relation to breakfast clubs, where there were no economies of scale.

There then followed: Sir John Coles, CEO of United Learning; Sir Dan Moynihan, CEO Harris Federation; and Luke Sparkes, CEO Dixons Academy Trust. This panel were, of course, strongly opposed to any restrictions on the pay and conditions of teachers in academies, which they felt would stifle innovation. Trusts had the experience and expertise to act quickly to turn schools round – a capability and capacity that local authorities no longer had. The panel confirmed that they had been consulted at any stage while the Bill was being prepared. Again, there was a call for a clear Government narrative to set out their plans for school improvement.

The next panel comprised: Rebecca Leek, Suffolk Primary Headteachers Association; June Wilson, Northern Education Trust; and Leora Cruddas, Confederation of School Trusts. As with the previous panel, the focus was on the strengths of academies and there was strong support for the agility that a trust could exercise when there were particular problems in a school. The additional flexibility that academies could use were a valuable tool. Any move back to a one-size-fits-all approach to schools would prevent schools

*(Continued on page 44.)*

***“The next panel (Neil Genders, CoE, and Paul Barber, RC) disagreed about the admissions cap on faith schools, with the CoE wanting to be more inclusive than the RC. The CoE was more interested in meeting the needs of the local community while the RC stressed the demands from parents for a Catholic education. The CoE raised the position of small primary schools, particularly in relation to breakfast clubs, where there were no economies of scale.”***

*(Continued from page 43.)*

taking the most appropriate action: this including focusing on the core areas of the curriculum to improve particular weaknesses. Particular attention was drawn to small primary schools. The need for schools and local authorities to work together was acknowledged.

David Thomas, CEO of Axiom Maths and former policy advisor at the DfE, argued for a careful balance between prescription and flexibility, more scope for flexibility in schools on pay and conditions, working practices, QTS and the curriculum. He explained that having experienced, qualified subject specialist – the gold standard – were not always available.

Kate Anstey, from CPAG, welcomed breakfast clubs but spoke strongly in favour of universal free meals in primary and secondary schools. She also felt that reducing the number of branded uniform items did not go far enough: parents should be supported with the cost of uniforms.

The final brief session was the opportunity for Katherine McKinnell, Schools Minister and Stephen Morgan, Early Education Minister, to answer questions. The Schools Minister said that the government's ambition is to give every child a national core of high-quality education, creating a school system rooted in collaboration and partnership, acknowledging the transformational change that academies had made. Action against academies that did not observe a legal duty would be proportionate. The Early Years Minister pointed to the various measures that would support parents whose children were living in poverty.

### **Comment**

The first day of the Committee, taking evidence from representatives of organisations across the whole of the DfE's responsibilities for children and young people yielded few surprises.

All of the witnesses were in favour of the section on children's wellbeing, including those from the education sector. There was no dissent from any of the witnesses about the need to tackle children's wellbeing and poverty, with many of those from the childcare sector urging the government to go further. The witnesses strongly supported the introduction of a unique identifier for every child and measures to improve safeguarding, with much more monitoring of children educated at home.

On the schools section of the Bill, as the Government was reversing some of the reforms made by the Coalition and then the Conservative governments, there was much more opposition to what was seen as a centralisation of control over all schools, particularly in terms of pay and conditions, QTS and the curriculum. There was a consensus about schools needing to collaborate, particularly on admissions.

The Labour members of the committee were, of course, seeking the support of the witnesses for the government's direction of travel on children's wellbeing and school reforms. The Conservative members focussed on those aspects of the legislation that they saw as unpicking fourteen years of progress. The Liberal Democrats were laying down markers on issues that they would be seeking to amend.

It is unlikely that many opposition amendments or new clauses will be accepted during the committee stage in the Commons, or indeed at report or third reading. When the Bill reaches the House of Lords, it is likely that the Bill will be sent back to the Commons with significant changes.

***“On the schools section of the Bill, as the Government was reversing some of the reforms made by the Coalition and then the Conservative governments, there was much more opposition to what was seen as a centralisation of control over all schools, particularly in terms of pay and conditions, QTS and the curriculum. There was a consensus about schools needing to collaborate, particularly on admissions.”***

## Education, Health and Care Plans

**M**arie Goldman (LDP, Chelmsford) introduced a debate on Government support for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs). She highlighted the significant issues within the EHCP system, emphasizing that children and parents are not receiving the necessary support. Even when EHCPs are granted, schools often fail to deliver the required support, leading parents to take legal action against local authorities. The waiting times for EHCP decisions vary greatly, with some councils performing better than others.

Imran Hussain (Lab, Bradford East) and Sarah Dyke (LDP, Glastonbury and Somerton) echoed the need for a comprehensive review of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system, citing the postcode lottery in funding and support. Marie Goldman agreed that the system is broken and needs urgent reform. She stressed the importance of immediate action to alleviate the current problems, as children are suffering due to the lack of support. Sarah Dyke pointed out the inequality in SEND funding across the country, with some councils receiving significantly less funding than others.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Lab, Slough) highlighted the below-average attainment outcomes for children with SEND in his constituency and the need to regain parents' trust in the system.

Marie Goldman emphasized the need for transparency and honesty with parents regarding EHCP waiting times. She shared examples of children suffering due to delays in receiving EHCPs, including a child with autism and sensory processing challenges who had been waiting for over a year. The debate also touched on the challenges faced by schools in providing support without adequate funding and resources.

Andrew George (LDP, St Ives) raised the issue of expensive home-to-school transport in rural areas, which adds to the challenges faced by families. Marie Goldman called for better communication between schools, local authorities, and parents, as well as more training for qualified and experienced SEND professionals. She suggested exploring options for fast-tracking training and creating structured roles for SEND professionals within councils. The debate concluded with a call for immediate action to improve the lives of children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Helen Hayes (Lab, Dulwich and West Norwood), chairman of the Education Select Committee, simply reiterated that we have a SEND system in crisis. She said it is letting down children and their families. "It is a contested and embattled system and is no way to decide and deliver on what is in the best interest of children. As Chair of the Committee, I welcome some of the measures that the Government are bringing forward, but I also believe that there is further to go. That is why, as the Committee, we have prioritised SEND as our first substantial new inquiry of this Parliament. I have good news for Members with constituents who are interested in and concerned about this subject: today we have extended the deadline for the submission of written evidence to 6 February."

The committee was serious about looking at the evidence of what is happening across the country, but also at where there is good practice, both in this country and overseas. "We will do our best to assist the Government to set out a programme of reform that delivers for children and their families. I urge all Members who have an interest in this topic to encourage their constituents to submit evidence to our inquiry."

Helen Maguire (LDP, Epsom and Ewell), one of the many new MPs who spoke, and especially Liberal Democrat MPs, said that the crisis was failing children, exhausting parents and overwhelming schools. She said that an excessive focus on meeting deadlines appears to have undermined the quality of the EHCPs. Decisions are increasingly being appealed, and parents in Surrey won 98.3% of appeals last year. Local headteachers have highlighted that EHCPs often do not accurately reflect the children's needs, leading to inappropriate placements. The children often become dysregulated and disruptive, which affects staff wellbeing and the learning environment for other pupils. The headteachers also reported that some assessments are being conducted remotely. Parents are increasingly asking headteachers to exclude their children, believing that that might be the only way to secure appropriate care. "That is a devastating indictment of the system. The system is failing at every single stage".

# The Erasmus programme

**L**ord Balfe (Con, Life) asked the Government what steps it was taking to fulfil demand for the revival or replacement of the Erasmus programme. (House of Lords, Oral Question debate, 20 January 2025.) The Minister of State, Department for Education, Baroness Smith of Malvern (Lab, Life) said that following the UK's departure from the EU, the Government had introduced the Turing scheme in 2021, to provide grants for students to study and work anywhere in the world. But she stressed that the Government had no plans for rejoining the Erasmus programme.

Lord Balfe said that the EU wanted a new EU mobility scheme for youth, and he argued that there was a great demand for that among young people in Britain. Baroness Smith said that the Government would consider EU proposals on a range of issues, but she added that there were no plans for a youth mobility scheme and the Government would not return to freedom of movement.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB, EH) argued that a critical advantage of Erasmus was reciprocity, which was lacking in the Turing scheme. Baroness Smith said that the focus remained on providing opportunities for UK students to experience the benefits of studying and working abroad.

Lord Wigley (PC, Life) said that there was an acceptance across parties in Wales that the full Erasmus scheme was much more beneficial for everybody in both directions. But he added that the reopening of it would not necessarily prejudice the attitude towards other questions relating to the European Union. Baroness Smith acknowledged that the noble Lord's recognition of Taith, the Welsh Government's international learning exchange programme, which, like the Turing scheme, provided important opportunities.

Lord Addington (LDP, EH) said that as David Lammy had said that he wanted to reinvigorate the relationship with the EU, would not the Erasmus scheme, or something very like it, be a good step towards that. Baroness Smith said that the Government was resetting the Government's bilateral relationships alongside its ambition for wider reset with the EU, as demonstrated by the Prime Minister's recent visits to France, Germany, Ireland, and Italy.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick (CB, Life) asked the minister why the Government had no plans to join Erasmus, as the scheme had been recognised by both main parties when in government as one of the major advantages of being in the EU. Baroness Smith said that while the Erasmus scheme may well have been a major advantage, the UK had to leave the scheme at the point at which the country had left the EU in 2020.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con, Life) argued that when the Labour Party had been in opposition, there had been endless questions condemning the previous government for not joining Erasmus. Baroness Smith said that the decision to leave the Erasmus scheme, had been a decision for which the current Government had not been responsible, but it needed to clear up the mess.

Lord Anderson of Swansea (Lab, Life) asked what the objection in principle was to having youth exchanges as part of a reset. Baroness Smith said it was important that there are opportunities for young people to study and work abroad, which was what the Turing scheme was currently doing, to an extent.

Baroness Smith of Newnham (LDP, Life) argued that the idea of Erasmus was not simply about British students going to other countries, but about a genuine exchange at the stage in life when it could fundamentally change people's experiences and help the United Kingdom in future.

Baroness Barran (Con, Life) pointed out that the Department for Education had recently published the updated guidelines for Turing applicants for 2025-26, which appeared to be identical to those published under the previous Government. She asked the minister to confirm that the funding would be maintained for the current year. Baroness Barran asked that, given how oversubscribed Turing was, would there be any shift in priorities between schools, colleges, and universities. Baroness Smith confirmed that the Turing scheme would continue for the coming year, and £105 million had been allocated for the year. She said that she would come back to Baroness Barran about the allocation for the following year.

Lord Berkeley of Knighton (CB, Life) said that the important thing about Erasmus had that it had not been just about education, as it was also about the wider cultural exchange of ideas. Baroness Smith said that where possible the Government could eradicate some of the challenges that had arisen in relation to children going to experience visits in the rest of Europe and to students being able to come to the UK.

# Child sexual exploitation and abuse

**A** statement made in the House of Commons on Thursday 16 January by the Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper (Lab, Oldham East and Saddleworth) was repeated in the House of Lords a few days later. (House of Lords, Ministerial Oral Statement, 20 January 2025.) The Home Secretary had said that she had set out the actions this Government are taking to tackle the terrible crimes of child sexual exploitation and abuse, including mandatory reporting, a new victims and survivors panel, an overhaul of data and police performance requirements, tougher sentences for perpetrators, and support for local inquiries, including in Oldham.

Lord Davies of Gower (Con, Life) expressed deep concern over the horrific crimes of child sexual exploitation and abuse, criticizing Labour-run local authorities for their lack of urgency in addressing these crimes. He highlighted that a significant portion of the British public, including Labour voters, supports a new statutory public inquiry into the grooming-gangs scandal. Despite recognizing the persistent threat of grooming gangs, he argued that the Government's measures are insufficient and called for robust data collection and enforcement. He condemned the culture of excuses and cover-ups in Labour-run council areas and emphasized the need for a unified national strategy to address systemic failures.

Baroness Brinton (LDP, Life) asked what support and recompense will the Government provide for the victims? She welcomed the commitment to lay out a timetable for implementing the recommendations of all the IICSA recommendations before Easter, but wondered whether the Minister had any idea of timescales for the possible start and finish for the discussion, consultation and implementation of these recommendations. She said that Lady Casey has other roles to fulfil. "Will her taking up this role slow down the other important work that she is doing?"

Lord Hanson of Flint (Lab, Life) is Minister of State at the Home Office and had previously served in the Blair and Brown governments as a Minister of State while in the House of Commons. He expressed disappointment with the tone of Lord Davies of Gower's remarks, suggesting that the issue of child abuse is not limited to Labour-controlled authorities. Lord Hanson emphasized the need to focus on stopping child abuse and implementing the recommendations from the Alexis Jay report, which had not been acted upon by the previous government.

Baroness Butler-Sloss (CB, Life) said that she had spent almost all her legal and judicial life on child sexual abuse and child physical abuse. She had chaired the Cleveland child abuse inquiry. She agreed with much of what the Minister has said. She said: "I suggest to the Government that now is not the moment to have a full statutory inquiry. What is crucial is to have the recommendations of all the earlier inquiries implemented as quickly as possible. A statutory inquiry at this moment—whether we need it later is another matter—would impede the Government from getting on with what needs to be done. I was lucky because many of my recommendations were actually accepted, but one of the shocking aspects of our endless statutory inquiries is that that is unusual. We have a history across this country of statutory and other inquiries with endless excellent recommendations, almost none of which are taken up. This is the moment—on a subject of excruciating importance, where there are so many victims across the country—to see that something is done, not talked about."

Baroness Berridge (Con, Life), a former Parliamentary Under Secretary for Education, shared her experience of giving evidence to IICSA and serving on the Select Committee that reviewed statutory inquiries. She emphasized the importance of the Truth Project, which involved around 6,000 victims and was highly valued for its cathartic nature. Lord Hanson of Flint responded by highlighting the Government's commitment to putting victims at the centre of their response to recommendations, mentioning the ongoing work on mandatory reporting and other measures. He stressed the need to involve victims' experiences to prevent future abuse. Lord Mann raised concerns about the process of statutory inquiries and the need for parliamentary scrutiny. He asked which Cabinet member would lead the inquiry and suggested that the Minister take responsibility for reporting progress.

Lord Laming (CB, Life) expressed the collective agreement of the House on the necessity of improving the prevention of child sexual abuse. He highlighted the challenge and noted that while the methods to achieve this are known, the current financial state of local authorities, many of which are nearing bankruptcy, is causing the withdrawal of essential services.

# Primary schools swimming lessons

**B**aroness Hoey (Non-Afl, Life) asked the Government what assessment it had made of the number of children in primary schools who did not have regular swimming lessons in school time. (House of Lords, Oral Question debate, 21 January 2025.) The Minister of State, Department for Education, Baroness Smith of Malvern (Lab, Life) said that swimming and water safety was a compulsory element of the primary PE national curriculum.

She pointed out that while the Government did not collect data from every primary school about how many lessons pupils received, sample data from Sport England had found that in 2023-24, 95.2% of state primary schools surveyed had reported providing swimming lessons. The minister added that the Department also supported schools to provide swimming and water safety lessons through teacher training and resources, and the PE and sport premium for top-up lessons.

Baroness Hoey argued that because children had to be able to swim 25 metres, there was a tendency, that once they had ticked that box, that was the end of swimming for many of youngsters, and many did not have the family support to get it outside school. Baroness Smith said that the Department needed to think about how schools could provide more opportunities for broader sporting activity, including swimming, and, of course, how community facilities, which had been reduced in recent years, could support the broadest possible engagement, including from those children whose parents were less able to take them for swimming lessons and activities which was the case currently.

Lord Storey (LDP, Life) patron of the Royal Life Saving Society, said that in the 10 to 16 age group, one in three young people could not swim; which was the group with the highest occurrence of drowning. He pointed out that within the black community, 95% of adults and 80% of children could not swim; and the figures were roughly the same in the Asian community. Baroness Smith said that although work was ongoing through the Inclusion 2024 project to try to ensure that more children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, had access to swimming.

Lord Hampton (CB, Life) said that Swim England had reported that, since 2011, almost 500 publicly accessible pools had closed, and child drowning deaths had doubled in the last four years. Baroness Smith noted that there had also been a 7% increase in the pay-per-swim cost in the last year. She stressed that whether in schools, where teachers must be supported with the skills to develop children's basic swimming skills, or in the provision across communities more widely, more need to do to support swimming.

Baroness Berridge (Con, Life) asked whether the Government had been looking at whether the cost of additional items such as swimwear was part of the barrier to children, as they grew so quickly. Baroness Smith said that she was not aware of whether expecting branded swimming items was a barrier to children being able to swim, but if it was it was wrong.

Lord Watts (Lab, Life) urged the Government to look again at whether the Government should provide new swimming pools in the most deprived parts of Britain. Baroness Smith said that the Government would continue to encourage local authorities to invest in leisure facilities, notwithstanding the considerable pressures on their funding that they had faced over recent years.

The Earl of Effingham (Con, EH) asked the minister to focus on bringing no mobile phones in schools and more physical education in the curriculum. Baroness Smith claimed that while the Government had acted quickly, it had been in government for only six months.

Baroness Pinnock (LDP, Life) asked the minister whether she would be prepared to go to her department to see whether grants were available for local government to fund new swimming pools, particularly in areas where there was no public swimming pool. Baroness Smith repeated that it was the responsibility of local authorities to provide swimming pools.

***“Baroness Berridge (Con, Life) asked whether the Government had been looking at whether the cost of additional items such as swimwear was part of the barrier to children, as they grew so quickly.”***



# Higher education regulatory approach

**A** Ministerial Statement on the Higher Education Regulatory Approach was made in the House of Commons on January 15. It was repeated in the House of Lords by the Minister of State for Education, Baroness Smith of Malvern (Lab, Life). The statement in the Commons had begun by emphasizing the importance of academic freedom and freedom of speech in universities, stating that these freedoms are more important than the wishes of some students not to be offended.

The Minister paused the commencement of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 in July 2024 to address concerns raised by various stakeholders, including academics, universities, and students (Minister). The Minister highlighted the importance of considering the views of minority groups, particularly in light of the rise in anti-Semitism on campus, and confirmed £7 million in funding to tackle anti-Semitism in educational institutions (Minister). The Minister proposed implementing key elements of the Act, such as duties on higher education providers to secure and promote freedom of speech, a code of conduct on freedom of speech, and a ban on non-disclosure agreements in cases of bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct.

Baroness Barran (Con, Life) the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Education in the last Conservative government and now Shadow spokesman on education in the Lords, welcomed the decision to commence the Act but regretted the delay and changes proposed by the Government. She raised concerns about the separation of complaints routes for academics and students and questioned the rationale behind it. She also expressed concerns about the removal of provisions related to student unions and the potential gap in protection for free speech on campuses. She asked for clarity on the timeline for implementing the Act and the amendments proposed by the Government. She also questioned the removal of the tort clause and its impact on universities' legal responsibilities. Finally, she raised concerns about the timing of the removal of overseas funding measures and its potential connection to the Chancellor's recent trip to China.

***“Baroness Barran (Con, Life) the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Education in the last Conservative government and now Shadow spokesman on education in the Lords, welcomed the decision to commence the Act”.***

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LDP, Life) welcomed the removal of parts of the Act that the Liberal Democrats opposed, stating that the Act was driven by a right-wing culture war and contradicted principles of respect for autonomous bodies and limits to government regulation. He highlighted the disproportionate regulatory and financial burdens imposed on universities and student unions by the Act and expressed concerns about the potential impact on free speech. He also raised concerns about foreign funding and the need for careful consideration of its implementation.

Baroness Smith of Malvern responded to the concerns raised by Baroness Barran and Lord Wallace of Saltaire, emphasizing the Government's commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom. She explained the rationale behind the separation of complaints routes and the decision to remove provisions related to student unions. She also addressed concerns about the removal of the tort clause and the timing of the removal of overseas funding measures. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of promoting a culture of free speech and debate in universities and called on all stakeholders to nurture this culture.

Baroness Falkner of Margravine raised concerns about the lack of consultation with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and emphasized the importance of the public sector equality duty in the proposed litigation. Baroness Royall of Blaisdon (Lab and Co-op, Life) is the Principal of Somerville College, Oxford, and was Leader of the House of Lords for the last eighteen months of Gordon Brown's premiership. She welcomed the Government's “proportionate approach” and emphasised the importance of universities instilling a culture of free speech. She asked about the OfS's power to consider complaints and the conditions of regulation. Baroness Smith of Malvern responded by emphasizing the importance of engagement and best practices in promoting free speech in universities.

# Children and young people's literacy

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab, Life) asked the Government what assessment it had made of the National Literacy Trust's 2024 annual literacy survey which had showed that children and young people's reading for enjoyment had fallen over the past year to an all-time low, and of the link between that and the fall in the number of secondary schools with a designated onsite library area.**

The Minister of State, Department for Education, Baroness Smith of Malvern (Lab, Life) said that the Department had implemented a range of measures to support reading for enjoyment, including through the English hubs programme and the reading framework. She stressed that head teachers had the autonomy to decide how best to spend their core schools funding, including how best to provide a library service for their pupils. The minister added that given that autonomy, the Department did not collect information on the number of secondary school libraries.

Lord Watson said that reading levels among school age children had plummeted recently, not just because of the prominence of mobile phones, because comparable-aged children in comparable EU states had higher reading levels. He argued that it was very much the case that the closure of school libraries had had an important impact on that.

Lord Watson said that while school leaders did indeed have the right to decide the best delivery of library services, for whatever reason, it was not working. He added that if figures were not collected on school librarians and libraries, they should be, and school leaders needed to be reminded of their role in encouraging reading for pleasure, to assist with children's development and literacy and oracy skills.

Baroness Smith said that perhaps the additional core school funding being provided, could be used to organise a school library, book corner or book stock to make reading accessible and attractive to readers. Baroness Bull (CB, Life) said that reading achievement for 10-year-olds in England was higher than the international average, and the last Government should be congratulated on all its efforts towards achieving that. Baroness Smith said that although the ability to read was a fundamental basis for all children, it was also important to find a range of ways, including using other partners in the creative area and elsewhere, to engage a passion for reading.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall (Lab, Life) asked what efforts the Government was making to explain more clearly to people who might otherwise not understand the benefits of reading to children how important it was, and how important it was to start very early, long before children can speak. Baroness Smith agreed about the need to provide support as early as possible to parents who perhaps do not find it easy to understand how to do that.

Baroness Garden of Frogmal (LDP, Life) asked what emphasis was given in primary schools to ensuring that primary children enjoyed reading. Baroness Smith said that one of the important roles of the English hubs programme, which the Government was supporting with a further £23 million in the current year, had been to ensure that access to high-quality reading and elements of reading for pleasure were provided for teachers across primary schools, including the opportunity for continuous professional development, specifically in reading for pleasure, for teachers.

Lord Kamall (Con, Life) asked the minister about the work that her department did with many of the civil society organisations and charities to increase literacy, not only for children but for adults. Baroness Smith said that the Government had provided grant funding for early years voluntary and community sector partners, including the National Literacy Trust, to work with families.

Lord Hampton (CB, Life) said that the National Literacy Trust had said that one in seven primary schools in the UK did not have a library, and in London it was one in four. Baroness Smith said that the Government's reading framework would make sure that schools knew and had the information and best practice available to them to develop libraries if they did not have them, and to make the most of them if they did.

Baroness Barran (Con, Life) asked the minister to reassure the House that writing would retain at least the same importance in the curriculum and assessment review, and would she be able to update the House on when it would see the interim report. Baroness Smith said that the interim report would be available in the early spring.

# Free schools and academies

**B**aroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con, Life) opened a debate on the achievements of academies and free schools. She had been Leader of the House of Lords from 2016 to 2022. (House of Lords, Motion to Take Note, 23 January 2025.) She was Chief Operating Officer of the New Schools Network from 2011 to 2013 and Deputy Director of the Policy Exchange think tank from 2008 to 2011.

She emphasising the importance of a high-quality education system in creating opportunities for all children. She acknowledged the success of maintained schools but highlighted the significant progress made by academies and free schools over the past 25 years.

England has seen improvements in educational outcomes, with a notable rise in PISA league tables for maths, reading, and science. The number of academies has increased significantly, and 90% of schools are now rated good or outstanding. However, challenges remain, such as closing the attainment gap for pupils on free school meals, improving attendance, and addressing the mental health crisis among young people.

Lord Harris of Peckham (Con, Life), the man behind the Harris Federation of academy schools, and a long-standing donor and member of the Conservative Party, expressed disappointment with the new Bill, recalling his experience with CTC schools and academies. He highlighted the success of his academies, noting that 73% are outstanding compared to the national average of 14%. He emphasised the importance of primary education, sharing examples of schools that improved significantly under his management. He also mentioned the challenges faced, such as opposition from the Labour Party, but noted the positive outcomes, including high university attendance rates among disadvantaged students.

The former Education Secretary Baroness Shephard of Northwold (Con, Life) expressed her admiration for Lord Harris's enthusiasm and congratulated Lady Evans on her opening to the debate. She confessed her initial misgivings about academies when they were first introduced by the Blair Government but acknowledged that the spirit of the academy movement was already present in previous Conservative Governments' initiatives. She recalled her experience as a Chief Inspector of Schools in Norfolk, where she became Deputy Chief Education Officer and later chairman of the education committee of the Norfolk County Council.

She emphasised the importance of education being democratically accountable through elected bodies but also recognised that the best schools were led by innovative and creative heads who were often frustrated by the constraints of the local authority system. The academies movement attracted these creative leaders, resulting in nearly 50% of schools becoming academies and significant improvements in international league tables for maths and science. She highlighted the success of academies in providing support and hope for failing local authority schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas. She questioned the need for the new Bill to limit the powers of academies and expressed hope for a cross-party agreement to maintain good educational standards for the benefit of future generations.

Another former Education Secretary, Lord Baker of Dorking, the life president of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, expressed support for several aspects of the Bill, including funding for under-fives, breakfast clubs, and special educational needs. He also supported the registration of home education but criticised the Government's approach to the new curriculum. He argued that merging maintained schools with free schools and academies to achieve a broad and balanced curriculum would not lead to economic growth. Instead, he emphasized the need for strong technical and practical education in ordinary comprehensives. He highlighted the success of university technical colleges (UTCs), which offer a practical curriculum determined by local employers and have achieved remarkable results. UTCs have a high percentage of students going into apprenticeships, university STEM subjects, or local jobs.

The Minister of State, at the Department for Education, Baroness Smith of Malvern (Lab, Life), claimed the Government's mission was to drive high and rising standards in all schools, emphasizing the importance of evidence-based approaches such as phonics, a knowledge-rich curriculum, and ordered classrooms. She highlighted the success of multi-academy trusts and free schools in delivering high standards and innovation. The Minister acknowledged the challenges faced by the education system, including the need to improve reading, writing, and maths skills, support disadvantaged children, and address the impact of the pandemic on attainment and attendance.

# Answers to written parliamentary questions

The following written questions and their answers were published in *Hansard* last week.

## House of Commons

### Department for Education

#### Construction: Vocational Education

**Richard Holden:** [22703] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether her Department provides support programs including (a) appropriate training, (b) mentorship and (c) career pathways to encourage young people to enter the construction sector.

**Janet Daby:** This government is working to create a clear, flexible, high-quality skills system that supports people of all ages, breaking down the barriers to opportunity and driving economic growth. The department has already established Skills England to ensure we have the highly trained workforce needed to deliver the national, regional and local skills needs of the next decade. It will ensure the skills system is clear and navigable for both young people and older adults, strengthening careers pathways into jobs across the economy.

A wide range of government-funded programmes are available for people of all ages to access education and training and develop a career pathway in construction. These include apprenticeships, T Levels, Skills Bootcamps, and Free Courses for Jobs. There are currently 91 high-quality apprenticeship standards in the construction and the built environment sector, with a further two standards in development. The department has introduced innovations to support growth of training programmes in the sector.

For example, we are making apprenticeships more flexible through flexi job apprenticeships. There are Skills Bootcamps around the country that offer courses in different areas of construction. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has recently published occupational maps on their website displaying the apprenticeship progression opportunities in each occupation. The occupational maps can be accessed via their website at: <https://occupational-maps.instituteforapprenticeships.org/>.

These maps also specify if the occupation is embedded within the green occupational landscape and deliver sustainable outcomes. T Levels also provide an excellent option for 16 to 19 learners and include valuable workplace experience through an industry placement of at least 45 days. Thousands of young people have benefited from T Levels in subject areas such as Design, Surveying and Planning, and Building Services Engineering, which can lead to rewarding careers in the construction sector. There are 21 Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) currently available in the Construction and the Built Environment occupational route, with a further 19 becoming available from September 2025. HTQs are level 4 and 5 qualifications which have been independently approved as providing the skills employers need. Examples of HTQs currently available in these areas include Higher National Diploma (HND) in Modern Methods of Construction, HND in Architectural Technology and HNC Construction Quantity Surveying.

High-quality careers advice is an essential part of our missions to break down the barriers to opportunity and to drive economic growth. Our ambition is for everyone to have access to impartial careers information, advice and guidance throughout their lives. This will help open up more opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds to access the skills and training they need to succeed in the workplace and

to advance their careers.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

### **Education: British National (Overseas)**

**Helen Maguire:** [23693] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of introducing domestic fee status for the children of British National (Overseas) visa holders in the UK.

**Janet Daby:** Generally, to qualify for higher education (HE) student support and home fee status in England, a person must have settled status and have been ordinarily resident in the UK and Islands (Channel Islands and Isle of Man) for the three years preceding the first day of the first academic year of their course. This means that under existing student support legislation, holders of a Hong Kong British National (Overseas) visa would qualify for home fee status and financial support once they have acquired settled status in the UK and meet the three-year ordinary residence requirement. This also applies to any dependants who have been granted Hong Kong British National (Overseas) status. There are no plans to extend HE student support and home fee status to Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) or their dependants before they are settled in the UK.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

### **Further Education: Employers' Contributions**

**Helen Morgan:** [23930] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential impact of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions on specialist colleges.

**Janet Daby:** The department is receiving compensation in recognition of the increase in National Insurance contributions (NICs) paid by institutions it funds, including colleges, schools and other state-funded special educational needs and disabilities provision. Work is in progress to determine how that funding will be distributed, and more information will be provided as soon as is practicable. This NICs funding will be in addition to the £300 million and £1 billion funding increases announced at the Autumn Budget 2024 for further education and young people with high needs respectively, in 2025/26.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

### **Home Education: Registration**

**Graham Stuart:** [23131] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the cost to local authorities of (a) establishing and (b) maintaining a register of home schooled children.

**Graham Stuart:** [23132] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to provide additional funding to local authorities to (a) create and (b) enforce a register of children not in school.

**Graham Stuart:** [23133] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the monetary penalty issued to a person who has not registered their child would be under clause 436E of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

**Graham Stuart:** [23134] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the penalty for late payment for not registering home schooled children will be; and what the maximum penalty will be in the event of continued non-payment.

**Graham Stuart:** [23135] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate her Department has made of the proportion of children of peripatetic families not in school who will be captured by the proposed register of home schooled children.

**Stephen Morgan:** The measures in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill for statutory Children Not in School registers in every local authority in England, and the accompanying duties on parents and out-of-school education providers to provide information for these registers, will support local authorities in identifying all children not in school in their areas, and ensure that they receive the education they deserve. The department knows that the new duties created by the Children Not in School measures will create additional burdens for local authorities. Additional funding will therefore be provided to support local authorities to carry out these new duties. As part of our implementation strategy, we will conduct a new burdens assessment to determine the level of funding. Parents will not be issued with monetary penalties for failure to provide information for Children Not in School registers.

The consequence if a parent of an eligible child has failed to provide the required information for a local authority register is that the local authority has the power to commence the School Attendance Order process. Once an order has been issued, it is only if it is subsequently breached and the parent is convicted that this might lead to a monetary penalty not exceeding Level 4 on the standard scale for the parent.

The School Attendance Order process is not intended to criminalise parents of home educated children, but to ensure that those children receive a suitable education. In the autumn 2023 elective home education (EHE) data collection, local authorities recorded that 4.6% of the EHE population were known to them to be children from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities, which is in comparison to 0.4% of such children recorded to be in the wider school population. We will continue to engage with these communities as part of the implementation process, to ensure that their specific needs are identified and considered.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

### **Planning: Apprentices**

**Kevin Hollinrake:** [23140] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to make the Chartered Town Planner Level 7 Apprenticeship exempt from any reforms in access to the new Growth and Skills Levy.

**Janet Daby:** The government is committed to creating opportunities and economic growth supported by a strong skills system. There are tough choices that need to be taken on how funding should be prioritised in order to generate opportunities for young people, who too often have been locked out of accessing these opportunities that enable them to make a start in good, fulfilling careers.

Following reforms to apprenticeships, including the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017, apprenticeship starts by young people under 25 fell by almost 40% between the 2015/16 and 2023/24 academic years. The department will therefore be asking more employers to step forward and fund a significant number of Level 7 apprenticeships themselves outside of the levy-funded growth and skills offer.

The department is taking advice from Skills England, who engaged with employers on funding for Level 7 apprenticeships over the autumn, and the department expects to make a final decision on affected apprenticeships shortly. The department recognises that for some employers, Level 7 apprenticeships form an important part of their workforce and career development offers. Employers will still be able to offer and invest in these apprenticeships where they feel they provide a good return on their investment. Learners who have started these apprenticeships will be funded through to completion.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

## School Rebuilding Programme

**Ian Sollom:** [22407] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, which contractors have been chosen to carry out works under the school rebuilding programme; and on what criteria these contractors were chosen.

**Stephen Morgan:** The department procures contractors from its frameworks to deliver the vast majority of projects, including the School Rebuilding Programme. Information on the contractors on its frameworks, including the criteria for selecting contractors for individual projects, can be found on GOV.UK, and is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-buildings-constructionframework-2021/appendix-d-framework-contractors>.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

## Academies: Off-payroll Working

**Antonia Bance:** [23014] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to page 86 of the document entitled Academies consolidated annual report and accounts: 2021 to 2022, published on 5 February 2024, whether it is her Department's policy that off-payroll arrangements can be used for the payment of (a) headteachers, (b) governors, (c) other senior staff of schools in the maintained sector.

**Catherine McKinnell:** The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD) sets out the headteacher pay ranges and maintained schools must adhere to these statutory requirements. The STPCD also applies to other teachers in leadership, excluding some roles such as school business managers, and covers the arrangements for those on payroll. The STPCD can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-teachers-pay-and-conditions>. There is no legal power for schools, local authorities or the government to pay individuals on maintained school governing bodies for their governance duties. Local authorities would be best placed to provide information on off-payroll arrangements in maintained schools.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

## Schools: Discipline

**Dan Norris:** [23709] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, when she plans to next update guidance on removing pupils from the classroom. **Stephen Morgan:** In July 2022, the department published the updated 'behaviour in schools' guidance, which is the primary source of advice for schools on developing and implementing a behaviour policy, providing clarity and support to schools on removing pupils from the classroom. Updates to the guidance were informed by a call for evidence in June 2021 and public consultation in March 2022.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

## Schools: Uniforms

**Mike Martin:** [24580] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of section 23 of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill on schools' ability to participate

in team sports.

**Catherine McKinnell:** School uniforms play a valuable role in creating a sense of common identity among pupils and reducing visible inequalities, however, too many schools require high numbers of branded uniform items which creates a significant cost burden for families.

This is why the department has introduced legislation to limit the number of branded items of uniform and physical education (PE) kit that schools can require, to bring down costs for parents and remove barriers from children accessing sport and other school activities. This will give parents more choice in where to purchase uniform and allow them greater flexibility to make the spending decisions that suit their circumstances.

The department expects schools to ensure that all pupils can participate in all aspects of school life, including PE and sport. No pupil should be discouraged from participating in any aspect of school life, such as team sports or interschool competitions, because of the cost of additional uniform requirements. This limit allows school leaders to prioritise branding the uniform and PE kit items which best reflect the needs of their school, whilst reducing costs for parents. Our statutory guidance on the 'Cost of School Uniform' already requires schools to avoid being overly specific in their kit requirements for different sports and keep the number of items, particularly the number of branded items, to a minimum.

Research also tells us that the more choice that girls in particular have over what to wear for PE, the more comfortable they are and the greater the likelihood of their long term participation in sport. The research is available at the following link:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43602/documents/216689/default/>.

Schools will still be free to loan out specific competition kit where appropriate, however, the cost of PE and sports kit should never be a barrier to participation in PE and sport, and that is why this measure is needed.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

### **Teachers: Apprentices and Classroom Assistants**

**Mike Martin:** [23636] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of (a) fast-tracking higher-level teaching assistants to become teachers and (b) introducing teaching apprenticeships.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Teaching assistants (TAs) play a vital role in children's education. They are crucial to ensuring we give children the best possible life chances. The 'use of teaching assistants in schools' departmental survey from 2023 found that 23% of TAs with a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) qualification were 'extremely' or 'very' interested in undertaking training to become a teacher. TAs who are interested in gaining qualified teacher status (QTS) can do so through a range of existing routes.

TAs can gain QTS through both fee-funded and salaried Initial Teacher Training (ITT). Salaried routes allow TAs to continue to earn an income and may provide the opportunity to remain employed by their current school. Salaried ITT includes School Direct (salaried) routes and the Postgraduate Teacher Apprenticeship (PGTA) for TAs with an undergraduate degree, and the Teacher Degree Apprenticeship (TDA) for those without an undergraduate degree.

Teaching apprenticeships already exist and expand opportunities for people to become excellent teachers and allow successful candidates to earn and learn whilst obtaining QTS. In spring 2024, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education approved the new TDA standard.

Candidate recruitment to the TDA began in autumn 2024 and training will commence in autumn 2025. The PGTA will continue to be available in the 2025/26 academic year. Some TAs with an undergraduate degree and significant teaching experience may be eligible for the assessment only route to QTS. This route allows experienced teachers to gain QTS without undertaking additional training. To be eligible, currently, candidates must be able to demonstrate that they meet the Teachers' Standards without



further training and have evidence of teaching experience (i) in at least two schools (ii) for at least two years.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

### **Academies**

**Jenny Riddell-Carpenter:** [22804] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to continue the Academies Programme.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Academies are a crucial and valued part of our school system. This government is proud of the change the academies movement has delivered for children. The government's mission is to break down the barriers for all children. We're building on the academies programme to ensure that all children and every family has a core entitlement to a high standard curriculum taught by qualified, expert teachers, with space for innovation and flexibility beyond this. The department wants high quality trusts to continue to grow where schools wish to join them and there is a strong case for them to do so.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

### **Faith Schools: Admissions**

**Ruth Cadbury:** [23775] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to remove the 50% faith cap on newly opened schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:** The previous government launched a consultation proposing to lift the 50% faith admissions cap that applies to free schools designated with a religious character, where they are oversubscribed. The consultation closed last year and the department will respond in due course.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

### **Teachers: Recruitment**

**Damian Hinds:** [23733] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many new teachers in key subjects she expects to recruit each year.

**Damian Hinds:** [23734] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what percentage change in net recruitment from the last Parliament will be needed to meet the target of an additional 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects this Parliament. **Damian Hinds:** [23735] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure the target for an additional 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects this Parliament will be met.

**Catherine McKinnell:** High quality teaching is the in-school factor that makes the biggest difference to a child's outcomes and is thus essential to delivering the government's mission to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child. There are now 468,693 full-time equivalent teachers in state-funded schools in England, but this has not kept pace with pupil numbers, with teacher vacancies increasing more than five-fold since 2010.

This is why the government is committed to recruiting an additional 6,500 new expert teachers across our schools, both mainstream and specialist, and our colleges over the course of this Parliament. Our plans include getting more teachers into shortage subjects, supporting areas that face the greatest recruitment challenges and tackling retention issues.

The department will continue to work alongside the sector as we seek to re-establish teaching as an attractive profession, one that existing teachers want to remain in, former teachers want to return to, and new graduates wish to join. The department has made good early progress towards this key pledge by ensuring teaching is once again an attractive and respected profession, key to which is ensuring teachers receive the pay they deserve.

We have accepted in full the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools for 2024/25. Alongside teacher pay, we have made £233 million available from the 2025/26 recruitment cycle to support teacher trainees with tax-free bursaries of up to £29,000 and scholarships of up to £31,000 in shortage subjects. The department has also expanded its school teacher recruitment campaign, 'Every Lesson Shapes a Life', and the further education teacher recruitment campaign, 'Share your Skills'. A successful recruitment strategy starts with a strong retention strategy, and new teachers of mathematics, physics, chemistry and computing in the first five years of their careers will now receive a targeted retention incentive of up to £6,000, after-tax, if working in disadvantaged schools.

The department is also working closely with teachers and school leaders to improve the experience of teaching. This includes introducing a new school report card in place of Ofsted's single headline grades, to provide a clearer picture of schools' strengths and weaknesses for parents and more proportionate accountability for staff. It also includes enabling flexible working, such as allowing planning, preparation and assessment time to be taken from home, and making key resources to support wellbeing, developed with school leaders, available to teachers.

The department is also funding bespoke support provided by flexible working ambassador schools and multi-academy trusts, to ensure schools are able to capture the benefits of flexible working whilst protecting pupils' face-to-face teacher time. High quality continuous professional development is also key to ensuring we have and retain an effective teaching workforce. The department has established Teaching School Hubs across the country, which provide approved high quality professional development to teachers at all stages of their careers. These Hubs play a significant role in delivering initial teacher training, the Early Career Framework, National Professional Qualifications and Appropriate Body services.

Wednesday 22 January 2025

### Young Futures Hubs

**Munira Wilson:** [22085] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether Young Futures hubs will work with local prevention partnerships; and whether those services will be co-located.

**Janet Daby:** Young Futures Hubs will bring together services to improve access to opportunities and support for young people at community level, promoting positive outcomes, supporting crime prevention and enabling young people to thrive. This is part of the Young Futures Programme alongside which we will establish a network of Young Futures Prevention Partnerships to bring together key partners to identify children and young people at risk of being drawn into crime and offer support in a more systematic way to divert them. To make progress quickly and achieve impact across this programme, the department will need to build upon the existing structures it has in place, from physical buildings to local partnership working and the existing workforce.

Wednesday 22 January 2025

## Brain: Injuries

**Daisy Cooper:** [24213] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to publish guidance on the risks to children of acquired brain injuries in (a) schools and (b) sports clubs.

**Daisy Cooper:** [24214] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she has taken to encourage schools to adopt the recommendations on (a) preventing and (b) treating concussion in the UK-wide Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport, updated in November 2024.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Engaging in sports and physical activities, both within and outside the school environment, is crucial for a child's wellbeing and personal development. There are various resources already available to assist schools and sports clubs in assessing and mitigating any risks associated with these activities. The department's guidance, 'Health and safety: responsibilities and duties for schools', supports schools in evaluating the risks associated with their activities. The guidance can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthand-safety-advice-for-schools/responsibilities-and-duties-for-schools>.

It signposts to the Health and Safety Executive's guidance on promoting a balanced approach to children's play and leisure. Additionally, health and safety advice is available from the Association of Physical Education and the National Governing Bodies of individual sports, who are responsible for the regulation of their sports, and for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to protect participants from harm.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) continues to encourage National Governing Bodies to adapt the concussion guidance to their own sport where appropriate. Furthermore, on 24 November 2024, DCMS updated the 'Concussion Guidelines for Non-Elite (Grassroots) Sport'. These UK-wide guidelines aim to help players, coaches, parents, teachers, school staff, National Governing Bodies, and sports administrators effectively identify and manage brain injuries. The department and DCMS have been collaboratively disseminating the guidance to schools through various channels such as a sector email and a school stakeholder bulletin. This guidance can be accessed here: [uk-concussion-guidelines-for-grassroots-nonelite-sport---november-2024-update-061124084139.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/attachment_data/file/124084139/uk-concussion-guidelines-for-grassroots-nonelite-sport---november-2024-update-061124084139.pdf).

*Thursday 23 January 2025*

## Pupil Premium

**Matt Bishop:** [24381] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending eligibility for Pupil Premium Plus to (a) children who have not been looked after and (b) other children in kinship care.

**Catherine McKinnell:** The department is providing over £2.9 billion of pupil premium funding in 2024/25 to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils in England. The criteria for pupil premium eligibility are:

- Pupils who are recorded as eligible for free school meals or who have been eligible in the past six years.
- Pupils who have been adopted from care or have left care.
- Children who are looked after by the local authority. The portion of funding for looked after children and previously looked after children is often referred to as pupil premium plus and these pupils attract funding at a higher rate.

Pupil premium is not a personal budget for individual pupils and schools do not have to spend this funding so that it solely benefits pupils who meet the funding criteria. Schools can direct spending where the need is greatest, including to pupils with other identified needs, such as children in kinship care. Schools can also use pupil premium on whole class approaches that will benefit all pupils such as, for example, on high-quality teaching. The department will continue to keep eligibility under review to ensure

that support is targeted at those who most need it.

*Thursday 23 January 2025*

### **School Rebuilding Programme**

**Ian Sollom:** [22774] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many and what proportion of school rebuilding projects have (a) been completed, (b) been completed within their intended time frame and (c) have passed their original deadline.

**Stephen Morgan:** As of 31 December 2024, buildings have been handed over at 23 schools. Of these, demolition and ground works are complete at nine schools, with a further six forecast to reach practical completion this financial year. The programme started in 2020, with the first projects announced in 2021. In line with initial expectations for the programme, just under half of School Rebuilding Programme projects have commenced various stages of delivery activity, despite some market challenges caused by significant global events. The remaining projects have been given indicative start dates for delivery over the next few years based on a prioritisation of need, with building projects taking up to five years from commencement to complete.

*Thursday 23 January 2025*

### **Schools: Buildings**

**Ian Sollom:** [22406] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many temporary classrooms are currently in use in schools across England, broken down by number in use in (a) primary schools (b) secondary schools and (c) special schools.

**Stephen Morgan:** It is the responsibility of those who run schools, academy trusts, local authorities and voluntary aided school bodies, to manage the maintenance of their schools and alert the department if there is a concern with a building. Local authorities and academy trusts do not need to report the use of temporary classrooms to the department, therefore, the department does not hold this data. The department does provide support on a case-by-case basis, working with the sector, if it is alerted to a serious safety issue. The department always puts the safety and wellbeing of children and staff in schools and colleges at the heart of its policy decisions.

*Thursday 23 January 2025*

### **Curriculum and Assessment Review**

**Liz Jarvis:** [24528] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether she plans to include extra-curricular activities within her Department's curriculum and assessment review.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Extracurricular activities, although not within the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review's remit, clearly interact with the content of the curriculum. This government is interested in recommendations that help to deliver a rich and broad curriculum.

*Friday 24 January 2025*

## Free School Meals

**Luke Charters:** [24015] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the potential merits of auto-enrolment schemes for free school meals.

**Stephen Morgan:** There are currently around 2.1 million pupils eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM). The department recognises the vital role played by FSM and encourages all eligible families to take up their entitlement. To make this as easy as possible the department provides the Eligibility Checking System, which allows local authorities to quickly verify eligibility for FSM.

Further to this, the department is aware of a range of measures aimed at maximising take up of FSM, including through approaches being trialled by local authorities. We welcome local authorities taking action to ensure government support reaches families, subject to them meeting legal and data protections requirements. The department is working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to develop a child poverty strategy to reduce child poverty by tackling its root causes and giving every child the best start in life.

As with all government programmes, the department will keep its approach to FSM under continued review.

*Friday 24 January 2025*

## Holiday Activities and Food Programme

**Dame Caroline Dinage:** [24633] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will announce funding for a multi-year extension to the Holiday activities and food programme.

**Stephen Morgan:** The government recently announced over £200 million funding for the holiday activities and food (HAF) programme for 2025/26. The HAF programme has been delivered nationally by local authorities in England since 2022, to provide healthy meals, enriching activities and free childcare places to children from low-income families, benefitting their health, wellbeing and learning. Funding beyond March 2026 will be subject to the multi-year Spending Review taking place later this year.

*Friday 24 January 2025*

## Home Education

**Dr Roz Savage:** [24396] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps the Government is taking to help ensure accurate representation of (a) cases involving children already known to social services and (b) other aspects of home education in (i) public statements and (ii) media coverage.

**Janet Daby:** Public statements issued by the department are reviewed for accuracy by policy officials, communications specialists, special advisers and, where needed, lawyers. The department also draws on information from external sources such as local authorities' children's services departments where relevant. The department's media team maintains a comprehensive record of all media queries and public statements made in response to journalists which can be drawn on for future enquiries. Similar processes are followed by the department's correspondence team and ministerial private offices. Publicly available statistics are published by the department on the GOV.UK website. The department cannot comment on the content of external sources which are not the department's responsibility and can only comment on information provided by the department itself.

**Lee Anderson:** [24478] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps her Department has taken to ensure parents maintain the right to home educate their children.

**Stephen Morgan:** Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 sets out a parent's right to educate otherwise than at school, i.e. to home educate. The department knows many parents work hard to provide a suitable education for their children in their home environment.

*Friday 24 January 2025*

### Outdoor Education

**Darren Paffey:** [25095] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of outdoor education for (a) children's access to outdoor learning opportunities and (b) the development of skills; and the (i) adequacy and (ii) sustainability of the funding for outdoor education.

**Catherine McKinnell:** All children and young people should have the opportunity to learn about and connect with nature. Spending time in, and connecting with, nature has been linked with improved mental and physical health outcomes for children and young people. The most consistent findings point to improved resilience, decreased stress, increased levels of physical activity, and lower levels of obesity.

Outdoor education specifically is also linked to improved motivation, social capital, and sense of belonging in school. The department is supporting a 12-month project (running from July 2024 to June 2025) led by researchers at the University of Oxford. The project will assess the evidence of nature-based programmes for mental health and wellbeing in young people, delivered through schools. Evidence will help the department understand the value of nature for mental health in the school environment. We expect to receive outputs, including a peer reviewed paper and policy brief, in summer 2025. More information about the project can be found here: <https://www.agileinitiative.ox.ac.uk/sprints/is-nature-a-policy-solution-to-mental-health-in-schools/>.

Through the National Education Nature Park initiative, children and young people have exciting opportunities to participate in low or no cost outdoor education within the boundaries of their education setting. Participating children and young people will also develop their scientific, analytical and digital mapping skills.

This will allow them to build careers and access jobs that require a knowledge of sustainability and climate change to support the transition to net zero and nature's recovery. The department announced £15 million of capital funding over the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years as part of the roll out of the National Education Nature Park. This funding is available to support settings and young people that need the most help in accessing nature.

*Friday 24 January 2025*

### Teachers: Pay

**Laurence Turner:** [25523] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to the Answer of 10 January 2025 to Question 23229, on Teachers: Pay, if she will provide the same data for newly qualified teachers.

**Catherine McKinnell:** Information on the school workforce is published in the 'School workforce in England' statistical publication, which is available here: <https://explore-educationstatistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>.

The attached table provides the full-time equivalent median average salary for newly qualified

teachers in academy schools, free schools, local authority maintained schools and all state-funded schools in England, as at November 2023. Attachments: 1. 25523\_table [25523\_attachment\_nqt\_teacher\_pay\_2023.xlsx]

*Friday 24 January 2025*

## Cabinet Office

### Skills England: Statistics

**Mr Richard Holden:** [23483] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, whether he plans to lay an Official Statistics Order to designate Skills England's statistical outputs as official statistics.

**Georgia Gould:** The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. A response to the Hon gentleman's Parliamentary Question of 13th January is attached. Attachments: 1. Letter from the National Statistician [PQ23483 (1).pdf]

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

### Youth Mobility Scheme: EU Countries

**Sarah Olney:** [23402] To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, if he will have discussions with Cabinet colleagues on the potential merits of a youth mobility system between the United Kingdom and European Union.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** The Government set out clear priorities for the reset with the EU in the manifesto. There are no plans for a Youth Mobility Scheme.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

## Department for Culture, Media and Sport

### Youth Services: Finance

**Cat Smith:** [24185] To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, how much funding allocated to the National Citizen Service will be redistributed to youth services.

**Stephanie Peacock:** Funding allocations for specific programmes will be communicated in due course, following the completion of business planning.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

## Department of Health and Social Care

### Electronic Cigarettes: Young People

**Richard Holden:** [24255] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential impact of provisions within the Tobacco and Vapes Bill on trends in the level of usage of very high puff-count vapes among young people.

**Richard Holden:** [24256] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential implications for his policies of the Material Focus study entitled Big puff vapes are surging onto the market adding to the vape environmental crisis, published on 16 December 2024, and whether he plans to take steps to tackle the popularity of high puff-count vapes amongst 16 to 34 year olds.

**Richard Holden:** [24257] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of very high-puff count vapes on trends in the level of youth vaping.

**Andrew Gwynne:** Selling nicotine vapes to children under 18 years old is illegal. Yet due to the branding and advertising of vapes to children, one-in-four children aged between 11 and 15 years old tried vaping in 2023. The health advice is clear, that vaping is never recommended for children or non-smokers. Single-use vapes are playing a significant role in the rise of youth vaping; in 2024, 54% of current vapers aged between 11 and 17 years old in Great Britain were using them, increasing from 7.7% in 2021.

The Department of Health and Social Care is aware of the issues regarding 'big-puff' vapes, including those raised in the study referenced. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has laid legislation to ban the sale of single-use disposable vapes in England from 1 June 2025. Most 'big puff' vapes currently on the market are neither refillable or rechargeable, which means that they will be captured by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' forthcoming ban. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill will ban the advertising and sponsorship of all vapes and nicotine products. It will also provide regulation making powers to limit the flavours and packaging of vapes and nicotine products, as well as how these products are displayed. The Bill also provides powers that allow the Government to regulate the size of a tank or refill container, and the amount of liquid that can be included, as well as powers to standardise the size and shape of vapes, and to further restrict liquid availability. In addition, the Bill contains powers that allow us to regulate the amount of nicotine in a puff, so the Government is able to restrict the nicotine not only in the tank, but also the nicotine that can be emitted in the vapour. Future vaping regulations will be accompanied by impact assessments when the secondary legislation is laid.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

### Vaccination: Children

**Julian Smith:** [23742] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to allow children who are (a) out of school and (b) in alternative provision to receive seasonal vaccinations that are otherwise provided on school premises.

**Andrew Gwynne:** The Government is committed to protecting those most at risk from vaccine preventable diseases through vaccination, as guided by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. This includes the offer of a seasonal flu vaccine to children aged two or three years old, primary school aged children, from Reception to Year 6, secondary school aged children, from Year 7 to Year 11, and children in clinical risk groups aged from six months old to less than 18 years old.



NHS England is responsible for the commissioning of school age immunisation programmes that are delivered as part of the routine vaccination schedule. NHS England has confirmed that dedicated Immunisation Team providers are commissioned to deliver a 100% offer to all eligible school aged children, from Reception to Year 11, to get their flu vaccine at school. This is a mainly school-based model, with additional opportunities offered in community clinics for those who miss the school opportunity or who are not in mainstream education, for instance if they are home schooled. General practices are also commissioned by NHS England to deliver catchups for school aged children and young people on an opportunistic basis to maximise uptake. This information can be found at the National Health Service website, and is available at the following link: <https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/child-flu-vaccine/>

*Monday 20 January 2025*

### **Mental Health Services: Children and Young People**

**Munira Wilson:** [23436] To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what funding he plans to provide for child and adolescent mental health services in the next financial year.

**Stephen Kinnock:** Priorities and spending for the next financial year will be set out in the NHS Operational Planning Guidance for 2025/26, which is due to be published shortly. It will then be for integrated care boards, in line with the national guidance, to make their own decisions on allocations to services in their areas, including child and adolescent mental health services.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

## **Home Office**

### **Visas: Skilled Workers**

**Lorraine Beavers:** [24584] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of reviewing the minimum salary threshold for the Skilled Worker visa to provide exemptions for (a) the manufacturing sector and (b) other sectors with a shortage of workers.

**Lorraine Beavers:** [24585] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether she has made an assessment of the potential merits of applying regional weighting for the minimum salary threshold for the Skilled Worker visa. Seema Malhotra: The salary thresholds are in place to ensure that resident workers' wages should not be undercut and to protect overseas workers from being used as low-cost labour. The thresholds are set at the median levels according to the Office for National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. The Government's objective is to bring net migration down, linking migration with wider labour market policies, so that immigration is not used as an alternative to training or tackling workforce problems in the UK. These objectives are also why this Government has maintained the current salary the Skilled Worker route.

As the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) has said, salaries generally need to rise in response to shortages, which challenges the suggestion that shortages could be eased by paying lower wages. The MAC has also consistently advised against regional salary thresholds, on the basis that this could exacerbate existing regional pay differences.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

## Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

### Artificial Intelligence: Training

**Mike Amesbury:** [23826] To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he plans to take to ensure AI training is accessible to all sectors of society.

**Feryal Clark:** The AI Opportunities Action Plan will ensure the UK builds a strong, diverse talent pipeline, realising AI benefits across sectors. Through Skills England, work is underway to map out how we will meet this challenge, including identifying how new flexibilities in the skills offer can deliver on the aims of driving opportunity. Lifelong learning and adaptability will be key as we set people from all backgrounds up to prosper in an increasingly technology-driven world. Skills England will bring businesses, training partners and unions together with national and local government to meet industry workforce digital and AI skills needs.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

### Digital Technology: Older People

**Jim Shannon:** [23768] To ask the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, what steps he is taking to support elderly people with digital inclusivity.

**Chris Bryant:** Digital inclusion is a priority for this Government. We want everyone to have the access, skills, support and confidence to participate in a modern digital society, whatever their circumstances. We also understand that digital exclusion disproportionately impacts certain demographics, including older people. That is why, as we develop our approach to tackling this issue, we are working closely with key partners in the third sector, industry and local authorities to base interventions on and target them to individual needs. I hope to say more on this in the near future.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

## H M Treasury

### Further Education: VAT

**Nadia Whittome:** [24274] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether if Further Education colleges will be eligible to o reclaim VAT for renewable energy installations.

**James Murray:** Further Education (FE) colleges cannot reclaim the VAT they pay on goods and services. However, FE colleges benefit from a zero rate of VAT on installations of qualifying energy-saving materials if their buildings meet the definition of being used “solely for a relevant charitable purpose”. This VAT zero rate is in place until March 2027, after which it will revert to the reduced rate of VAT at five per cent. This relief – worth over £1 billion – will aid households and charities in improving the energy efficiency of their buildings, help to reduce carbon emissions, and ultimately help us to reach our ambitious Net Zero by 2050 target.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

## Schools: Uniforms

**Mike Martin:** [24579] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if she will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing VAT on school uniforms.

**James Murray:** VAT is a broad-based tax on consumption and the 20 per cent standard rate applies to most goods and services. VAT is the UK's second largest tax forecast to raise £171 billion in 2024/25. Taxation is a vital source of revenue that helps to fund vital public services including schools and hospitals. Children's clothing designed for young children, including branded school uniform, already benefits from VAT relief. To ensure that this relief is carefully targeted this relief is limited to clothing designed and labelled for children under the age of 14. Increasing the scope of this VAT relief to all school uniform would come at a cost to the Exchequer, with no guarantee that any reliefs would be passed on to consumers. We therefore have no plans to make changes here.

*Tuesday 21 January 2025*

## Private Education: Business Rates

**David Simmonds:** [24509] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 12 December 2024, to Question 17827 on Private Education: Business Rates, what estimate she has made of (a) how many independent schools will lose their 80 per cent charitable rate relief and (b) the average annual business rates bill for independent schools in 2025-26.

**James Murray:** As set out in the Government's impact note, using Department for Education data the Government has identified 2,444 private schools in England, of which 1,139 are charities. Private schools that are wholly concerned with the training or welfare of disabled people will be exempt from business rates under existing provision.

Private schools that are wholly or mainly concerned with providing education for pupils with an EHCP will also retain their charitable rate relief. Taken together, the Government expects the number of private schools that will lose business rates charitable relief to be 1,040. Government analysis also shows the average increase in business rates per pupil to be £308 in the financial year 2025-26. This note can be found here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0129/ImpactNote.pdf>

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

## Department for Work and Pensions

### Unemployment

**Laurence Turner:** [25525] To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 19 December 2024 to Question 19420 on Unemployment: Young People, what assessment she has made of the potential impact of the ongoing data quality problems with the ONS Labour Force Survey on her Department's ability to monitor progress towards the 80 per cent employment target.

**Alison McGovern:** The independent Office for National Statistics (ONS) are responsible for the LFS, which is an important source of labour market information for the Department. In order to monitor the department's progress towards an 80% employment rate we need a robust Labour Force Survey (LFS). As such, we are engaging regularly with the ONS on these data issues and supporting ONS to improve the quality of the LFS.

The Department for Work and Pensions also continues to make more use of statistics based on administrative data (for example, benefit caseloads or HMRC PAYE data) alongside LFS statistics to form the best labour market view. The ONS are also working on the Transformed Labour Force Survey to replace the LFS. The Department are working closely with the ONS and other government to ensure it is fit for purpose and provides reliable estimates of labour market trends. We remain focussed on getting more people into work to grow our economy and improve living standards across all parts of the country.

*Friday 24 January 2025*

## House of Lords

### Classics: State Education

**Lord Black of Brentwood:** To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the ending of the Latin Excellence Programme on access to Latin education in different parts of the country; and whether any areas will be disproportionately affected. [HL3794]

**Lord Black of Brentwood:** To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have to assist Key Stage 4 pupils in state schools whose study is disrupted by the closure of the Latin Excellence Programme; and what plans they have to ensure these students are able to complete their exam courses. [HL3795]

**Baroness Smith of Malvern:** The fiscal situation this government inherited means there are difficult decisions to take on how money is spent right across the public sector to ensure we deliver on our priorities. Given this, the decision has been made to not extend the Latin Excellence Programme beyond the end of the agreed initial three-year contract, which will end on 28 February 2025. This was not an easy decision, and we are grateful to the Centre for Latin Excellence for its work to deliver the programme and that of the schools who have participated. Over the course of the programme Latin was delivered to over 4,000 pupils in over 40 schools across England, with an emphasis on schools outside London and the South East. All schools on the programme will continue to have access to the curriculum resources and we hope that many schools will continue to deliver Latin after the programme ends. The department will work closely with the Centre for Latin Excellence to ensure that teachers currently delivering the Latin curriculum to key stage 4 pupils will be prioritised and will receive extra support in the lead up to the end of the programme on 28 February.

*Monday 20 January 2025*

### Artificial Intelligence: Investment and Skilled Workers

**Lord Taylor of Warwick:** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support the growth of the UK's AI sector, particularly regarding (1) investment into the sector, and (2) retention of skilled workers. [HL3912]

**Lord Vallance of Balham:** The IMF estimates the adoption of AI across the economy could boost productivity by up to 1.5 percentage points a year - more than doubling our growth rate since 2010. The AI Opportunities Action Plan sets out game-changing initiatives to make this a reality, including a twenty-fold increase in compute power and the creation of AI growth zones. The plan also aims to address the mismatch between supply and demand of UK AI talent. It sets out the essential role that equipping our workforce with the right skills and attracting top talent will play in growing the UK's AI sector.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

## Citizenship: Teachers

**Lord Norton of Louth:** To ask His Majesty's Government what percentage of state secondary schools currently have teachers who have qualified as citizenship education teachers, and what plans they have to increase the number of schools with such teachers. [HL3893]

**Baroness Smith of Malvern:** Delivering the government's objective to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child relies on a highly skilled workforce in schools, with high quality teaching the inschool factor that makes the biggest difference to a child's outcomes. There are now 468,693 full time equivalent teachers in state-funded schools in England but numbers have not kept pace with demand. Of the 3,435 state-funded secondary schools in England, 71.2% employed a teacher with a relevant qualification in citizenship. This figure relates to schools that supplied teacher qualification data. In some cases, teachers with a qualification in another subject may also teach citizenship in the school. We are focused on the need to boost teacher numbers in priority subjects across the country. This is why the government has set out the ambition to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers across our schools, both mainstream and specialist, and colleges over the course of this Parliament.

Measures will include getting more teachers into shortage subjects, tackling retention issues and supporting areas that face recruitment challenges. The government will continue to work alongside the sector as we develop our delivery plan and seek to re-establish teaching as an attractive profession. We have made good early progress towards this key pledge by ensuring teaching is once again an attractive and respected profession, key to which is ensuring teachers receive the pay they deserve. That is why this government has accepted in full the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools for 2024/25.

Alongside teacher pay, we have made £233 million available from 2025/26 recruitment cycle to support teacher trainees with tax-free bursaries of up to £29,000 and scholarships of up to £31,000 in shortage subjects. The department has also expanded its schoolteacher recruitment campaign, 'Every Lesson Shapes a Life', and the further education teacher recruitment campaign 'Share your Skills'.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

## Swimming: VAT

**Lord Kempell:** To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to mitigate any impact of placing VAT on private schools on swimming lessons run by swim schools using private schools' premises; and what plans they have to exempt swimming lessons from VAT. [HL3996]

**Lord Livermore:** The Government has conducted careful and thorough analysis of the impacts of placing VAT on private schools, and the Government's costings have been scrutinised by the independent Office for Budget Responsibility. The Government published a detailed costing note and Tax Impact and Information Note (TIIN) on 30 October 2024. To support access to swimming lessons, the Government already exempts them from VAT when they are supplied by an eligible non-profit-making body. This includes lessons provided by eligible bodies using premises owned by private schools.

*Wednesday 22 January 2025*

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