

Department for Education Board Meeting

16 March 2021, 12:00 – 14.30

Permanent Secretary's Board Room, DfE London and Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson
Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Gillian Keegan, MP

Richard Pennycook
Ian Ferguson
Irene Lucas
Ruby McGregor-Smith
Toby Peyton Jones
Nick Timothy
Susan Acland-Hood
Mike Green
Tony Foot
Fran Oram

Title

Secretary of State (Chair)
Minister of State for School Standards
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Apprenticeships and Skills
Lead Non-Executive Board Member
Non-Executive Board Member
Non-Executive Board Member
Non-Executive Board Member
Non-Executive Board Member
Non-Executive Board Member
Permanent Secretary
Chief Operating Officer
Strategic Finance Director
Director, Children's Social Care (deputising for Indra
Morris)

Other Attendees

Paul Kett

Eileen Milner
Keith Smith
Julia Kinniburgh

Mike Pettifer
Graham Archer

Sir Kevan Collins
Suzanne Lunn
Steph Brivio
Alison Wilson

Hollie Godsmark
Sevim Ekmekci
Shelley Cooper

Title

Director General, Higher Education and Further
Education
Chief Executive, Education and Skills Funding Agency
Director of Post-16 Skills and Strategy
Director General of Covid Response and Schools
Recovery
Chief of Staff, CRU
Director for Qualifications, Curriculum and Extra-
Curricular (QCEC)
Education Recovery Commissioner
Director, Children's Social Care
Director, Children's Social Care
Deputy Director, Vulnerable Children and Young
People
Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State
Head of Permanent Secretary's Office
Board Secretary

Apologies

Indra Morris

Title

Director General, Social Care, Mobility and
Disadvantage

1. INTRODUCTION, MINUTES AND ACTION TRACKER

- 1.1 The Secretary of State (SoS) welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies from Indra Morris.
- 1.2 No new interests were declared and the minutes and the action tracker from the previous meeting were accepted without amendment.

2. SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

- 2.1 The Board received an update on the Audit and Risk Committee, noting the progress on the Group and Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts (SARA). The ARC continued its oversight of the Department's controls environment.
- 2.2 The Board noted that the Implementation Committee had discussed the deployment of laptops and devices, work placements and effective collaboration with the Department of Work and Pensions across the skills agenda.
- 2.3 The Board was informed that the Leadership Team had focused on finance. Leadership Team had also discussed workforce issues and approved a new Diversity and Inclusion statement. The committee contributed to Future DfE, a piece of work that would allow the Department to test its policies against scenarios for the future.

3. SKILLS DELIVERY REFORM

- 3.1 The Board noted that the pandemic had accelerated the need for system change and there would be a significant focus on reducing youth unemployment in the short to medium term. Six key delivery aims of the Skills Reform Programme had been agreed.
- 3.2 Capacity amongst employers to provide T-Level industry placements and Apprenticeships was a key issue. Local and regional dialogue between employers and colleges would be an effective mechanism to generate work placements in local areas.
- 3.3 The Board noted that the DfE requires its construction suppliers to employ apprentices.

4. CAREER PATHS FOR APPRENTICE PROGRESSION

- 4.4 The Board considered an analysis of Apprentice progression in the DfE and noted that the Department would continue to exceed the public sector target for apprentice starts in 2020/21.
- 4.5 The Board discussed that the DfE could build on this success by increasing the number of apprentices recruited into the Department and supporting their career progression to ensure that apprentices are represented at all Civil Service grades within the DfE.
- 4.6. Board members discussed that the Department could work with its suppliers, schools, and colleges to ensure that apprentices are employed

across the sector.

5. UPDATE ON RETURN TO EDUCATION SETTINGS

- 5.1 The Board noted that over 99% of education settings were open in the week commencing 8 March 2021. There had been high levels of attendance in primary schools and attendance in secondary schools had increased steadily since opening.
- 5.2 The Board noted the risks associating with moving to home testing of students and learners. Members noted that these risks had been carefully balanced against cost, resources, lost teaching time, and space associated with running a mass testing programme in schools.
- 5.3 The Board agreed that the DfE must continue to prepare for future waves of COVID-19, including the prevalence of new strains of the virus against which the population is not protected.

6. UPDATE ON EDUCATION RECOVERY

- 6.1 The Board considered the figures on lost learning during the pandemic. Supporting Education Recovery would remain a cross-departmental priority and was a whole-parliament objective.
- 6.2 The Board noted that the aim of the recovery programme would be to build back a stronger and fairer education system after the pandemic. It was important to close the attainment gap but also to support the broader engagement of young people and to support their social development, mental health, and wellbeing.
- 6.3 The Board noted the Education Recovery strategy would aim to deliver a new settlement within the education system, including a world-leading teacher development programme.

7. SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- 7.1 The Board recognised that the impact of the pandemic had exacerbated population-wide trends that could lead to an increase in vulnerable children. The education outcomes for many vulnerable children were poor. Vulnerable Children and Young People's (VCYP) attendance in educational settings had been low during the national restrictions and the attainment gap between disadvantaged learners and their peers had widened.
- 7.2 Referrals to Children Social Care were currently lower than during the same period last year and an expected increase in referrals had not yet materialised.
- 7.3 Board members noted that modelling based on a wide range of evidence had been undertaken to predict demand for CSC services. This modelling

informed cross-departmental discussions on system capacity.

7.4 The Board recognised that good working arrangements between Local Authorities and schools were critical to effective safeguarding arrangements.

8. AOB

8.1 The Board accepted the proposed over commitments in the Capital budget and the Administration budget.

8.2 The Board agreed that it would meet more frequently.