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2. Education, training and skills (<https://www.gov.uk/education>)

Speech

# Education Secretary speech at ASCL's Annual Conference

Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson speaks at ASCL's Annual Conference 2020

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From:

Department for Education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>) and The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/gavin-williamson>)

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Thank you Richard for that kind introduction.

It is a really great honour to be here.

I just wish we were meeting under better circumstances.

The latest figures show that almost 600 cases of the coronavirus have been diagnosed and I know that all of you will be anxious about what the outbreak means for you, your schools, your colleges but also your wider communities.

As headteachers you are having to be steadfast. Children, parents, staff are all relying on your guidance and leadership.

So before I say anything else, I would like to thank you for all that you have done. You continue to inspire so many of us with your calm, resilient, optimistic leadership in the face of adversity.

I also want to take this opportunity to reassure you that my department is working flat out with Public Health England to share the latest scientific and medical information and advice with you as and when we get it, so that you know as soon as we do.

Ever since Covid-19 started causing concerns in January, my department has been issuing regular guidance and updates on how you should respond to keep your schools functioning and everyone in them fit and well.

We have daily updates and have launched a phone helpline and that's in addition to the guidance you can find from Public Health England and the Foreign Office.

Our GOV.UK site covers everything from preventing the spread of infection to what to do if a child in your care is ill or has returned to school from an area with a high infection rate.

The NHS has already tested over 29,000 people, including those who have travelled to areas where there are a high number of cases of Covid-19 and the vast majority of the results have been negative, so I urge you to bear this in mind.

In the overwhelming majority of situations, there is absolutely no need to close a school or send pupils or staff home. Obviously there is action to be taken in the event of a positive test but even then, your local health protection team can help stabilise the situation.

At present we are clear that the best course of action is to keep schools open unless you are advised to close by Public Health England.

The Chief Medical Officer has said the impact of closing schools on children's education will be substantial, but the benefit to public health would not be. The Government is particularly mindful of the strain on public services like the NHS that would be caused by key workers having to stay home to look after their children as a result of school closures.

We will be constantly reassessing this position based on what the Chief Medical Officer and the Government Chief Scientific Adviser tell us about whether the evidence would require us to close schools in the best interests of children and the best interests of teachers.

Only in line with this clear advice will we take this step.

Beyond this there are three things that are currently causing leaders more anxiety than anything else, so let me go through these one by one.

First, teachers and parents are understandably worried about school trips. While there is currently no need to cancel any domestic school trips or visits, we would ask you to make thorough risk assessments and be clear about what you'll need to do if anyone develops symptoms of the virus.

Second for those who are taking parties abroad we are in a situation that is changing very rapidly. The Government is advising all schools and colleges against overseas trips for under 18s.

Finally, I know your pupils will be worried about what all this means for their upcoming exams. This is only to be expected, especially when so much hard work has gone into them.

I see first-hand the enormous amount of work and effort that goes into exams by children and their teachers. I want to reassure you that we are doing everything to make sure that this year's exams are fair for students, and that their efforts will be fairly rewarded.

My department is in regular discussions with Ofqual, ASCL, schools and other unions, and we will continue to work together on these issues. We will ensure students, parents and teachers are kept up to date.

Until then it is important that we keep our focus on delivering the best for every child in our schools and colleges to ensure they are well prepared to succeed and well prepared to excel.

Ladies and gentlemen, I couldn't do my job without knowing that at the helm of every school or college is an exceptional leader. So at the risk of repeating myself, I would like to thank you - and all your staff - again for the incredible leadership you have shown in some very trying circumstances.

My department stands ready to continue working with you and the rest of the sector so that we can get through this together.

Because the reason, the reason we are gathered here today is to discuss the business of giving our children a great start in life.

My department has such a wide remit that it is all too easy to underestimate what a key role education plays in society.

This government has been given a historic mandate to level up opportunity and transform the lives and prospects of a generation.

I want you to be in no doubt how important you are to these plans.

Education is one of the greatest levers of social change.

Through education we can build the kind of society we want to see... a society that is open, a society that is tolerant, a society where everyone, regardless of where they're born, has the chance to realise their full potential.

We know that it is great teaching and great leadership that makes a world-class education.

There is no better way to raise standards or improve schools than by boosting the quality of teaching. So my priority is to help all our teachers and leaders to be the best they can be, to continuously develop their knowledge and skills throughout their careers, so that every child in the classroom in every school gets a world-class start in life.

So I want to thank you for all that you and your colleagues have done over the past decade to make sure even more of these children, our children succeed.

But I don't expect you to do this all on your own. Government has a role to play.

Working with you to transform the support for teachers and leaders is at the centre of my vision for making ours a nation of opportunity and today I'm going to spell out how we're going to do it.

But before I do, I would like to talk about the issue of funding.

I know many of you have had to manage budgets for some time and this has meant difficult choices for you. When I was first appointed to this job, I recognised immediately that you were just not getting the money that you needed for your schools.

I know we cannot push a revolution through on half measures. Which is why, when I fought for a new funding settlement, I didn't argue for a one-year deal; I didn't argue for a two-year deal; I argued for a three year deal... And that is what we got.

I am in no doubt that money spent on schools is an investment in all our futures. This is why I have secured the largest cash boost in school funding decade for the core schools budget – an extra £14.4 billion coming through over the next three years.

We have also announced increased funding of £400 million for 16 to 19-year-olds in school sixth forms and colleges for the coming year.

All of this additional investment will lay the foundations for the revolution in support for teachers and leaders that sits at the heart of my vision for schools.

I am determined to support you and your staff, and give you the means to excel over the course of your careers.

I understand that while we may not agree on everything, one thing we do share is our conviction that what will make the biggest difference to a child's education is the person standing at the front of the classroom.

The person that shares their knowledge with the child.

The person who inspires the child to learn.

The person who gives the child the confidence to succeed.

And this is particularly true for those children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

That is why we are going to transform the support for school teachers and leaders, from initial teacher training right through to those who are leading our schools.

I can promise three things:

First – that every school teacher is going to get the training and support they need to thrive in this profession, whether they are just starting out or whether they have years of experience behind them.

Second – that my department is going to work with you every step of the way, recognising that the key to improving the quality of teaching is right here in this room and in your schools.

Third – and most importantly – we will target additional investment at schools serving the most disadvantaged communities in this country.

Over the coming months, we are together going to create the development opportunities and career pathways that will make teaching more than a match for other highly regarded professions.

And all of this work will be underpinned by the best available evidence, independently assessed and endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation.

The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy we launched last year established a base for these reforms, starting with the Early Career Framework and the new core content framework for Initial Teacher Training.

These reforms, which are backed by at least £130 million a year, mean that from this September, all new entrants to the teaching profession will benefit from a three-year structured package of support at the start of their careers.

The Early Career Framework will be tested early in Greater Manchester, Doncaster, Bradford and the North East this autumn before a national roll out next year.

By the time it is fully up and running, up to 50,000 early career teachers and their mentors will be receiving this additional training at any one time.

That's over 100,000 teachers – almost a quarter of the entire teaching workforce – receiving world-class training and development every year.

We must, however, do more. That is why we are boosting starting salaries, which will rise to £30,000 for new entrants by 2022. And we are targeting interventions to help schools in disadvantaged areas retain their teachers, including through loan reimbursements and retention payments.

And I can promise you we will continue to build on this together. Transforming the support and development available to teachers and leaders is a career-long enterprise.

In particular I'm aware that there is one cohort of teachers who are often overlooked and that's those experienced teachers who don't want to lead their own school and yet deliver excellent teaching year in, year out.

These fantastic teachers need to know that their development and career progression matters just as much as anyone else's.

That is why we are creating a new specialist National Professional Qualification in Teacher Development, for teachers with responsibility for supporting the training and development of others, including early career teachers. And today I can announce that we will launch two further specialist qualifications. One will be to train and develop teachers who are subject leads or responsible for improving teaching practice in a subject or phase. The other will be for those whose role includes ensuring schools are calm and orderly places, by focusing on behaviour management and pupil wellbeing.

But as you know better than anyone, great school leadership is fundamental to making these reforms work.

Great leaders set a clear vision and ethos for their school, and they create the kind of environments where teachers are able to deliver great teaching.

So we are also reviewing the full current suite of leadership NPQs to make sure they cover the specific knowledge and skills that school leaders need for the future.

And we also know these qualifications can make the most difference for those leaders working in the most challenging schools and some of the most deprived areas. That is why we will provide additional investment, including £15 million in the next financial year, for those areas to access NPQs for free.

We want teachers and leaders to know that if they want the best professional development opportunities, they can find them in Oldham, Knowsley and Teeside, not just in London.

I am glad to say that the group that helped set up the specialist qualifications will be advising us to ensure that there is continuity and coherence and I am especially glad to say that we have managed to persuade Malcom Trobe, who is chairing the Headteachers' Standards review with such distinction, to join us in this work

These measures will create a golden thread running from Initial Teacher Training through to school leadership, rooting teacher and leader development in the best available evidence.

And I know that a world-leading development offer needs bringing to life by the very best practitioners in the profession.

That is why we are creating a world-leading infrastructure to match our reforms. At the heart of the new system will be the Teaching School Hubs.

These will be dedicated centres of excellence for teacher training and development. They will be led by some of the best schools and trusts and will be focused on delivering our new offer to all teachers.

The concentrated focus for Teaching School Hubs on teacher training and development will see a return to the original vision behind teaching schools, recognising teacher and leader development as the most important form of school improvement.

I'd like to move on to one of the main themes of the weekend and that's creating a strong, diverse leadership.

I've talked today about career pathways. And it is vital that we can attract and retain brilliant, talented teachers from across all groups, all faiths, all races and all genders and support them in their career journeys.

Rachel has just mentioned the work ASCL is doing to make sure our schools and colleges embrace diversity in all its forms and I warmly congratulate everyone involved in this. And encourage them in their work.

Which brings me to another aspect of diversity. The way people live and work is changing. Schools must reflect this, if they are to attract and retain great teachers.

I'd like to thank Geoff at this point because he has been a cheerleader for flexible working for some time.

We can't ease up on this. There are some amazing teachers who have been attracted into the teaching profession purely because they have found a school where they can work part time. The flipside of that will be those who quit because they can't find a school that has the same flexibility

We will be publishing our updated Flexible Working Guidance later in the spring as well as launching a group of Ambassador Schools who will be able to share with others what worked for them.

I said earlier that I am going to stop at nothing to make our schools the best they can possibly be and supporting you throughout your careers is the surest way to achieve that. I believe that the measures and commitments I have set out today will take this profession to new heights.

In particular, by next September, all teachers and leaders will have access to a clear, coherent framework for professional development; one that will support them at every stage of their careers. Every teacher will feel the benefit. But most importantly, those they teach will feel the benefit.

By continuing to improve the wider conditions for you to do your jobs, I know that the teaching community will flourish and the profession will be the rewarding and fulfilling one you so richly deserve.

I could not be more grateful for your leadership and I am so so enormously proud to be your champion in government. And so I look forward to working with you over the coming years to see that change and improvement.

Thank you.

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