

DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2020-0081, 03 July 2020

Spending of the Department for Education

Summary

On 7 July 2020 there will be an Estimates Day debate on the spending of the Department for Education on closing the gap and support for left behind children.

On 23 June the Backbench Business Committee considered bids for Estimates day debates and agreed that one of these debates in July, before Estimates are authorised, should be on the “spending of the Department for Education on closing the disadvantage gap and support for left-behind children”, a proposal put forward by Robert Halfon, Chair of the Commons Education Committee.

The Department for Education (DfE) proposes a total Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit of £72.1 billion (excluding student loans) in 2020-21. The DfE’s day to day spending within this limit is set to increase by £3.9 billion or 6.2%, from £63.4 billion last year to £67.3 billion in 2020-21.

The DfE’s Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit covering investment is set to decrease from £4.9 billion to £4.3 billion, a reduction of £0.6 billion or 11.9%, compared to last year.

This debate comes at a time when the Government has recently begun a phased reopening of schools after they have been closed to the vast majority of pupils since 23 March due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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1. Background

Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) proposes a total Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit of £72.1 billion (excluding student loans) in 2020-21. The DfE's day to day spending within this limit is set to increase by £3.9 billion or 6.2%, from £63.4 billion last year to £67.3 billion.

The increase reflects:

- £3.1 billion extra for schools (+6%);
- £358 million extra for further education (+7.3%);
- £352 million extra for Education and Skills Funding Agency (+15.2%), the increase primarily relating to apprenticeships; and
- £43 million extra for social care and disadvantage (+11.5%) primarily to address Children's Social Care, SEND and Alternative Provision.

The DfE's Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit covering investment is set to decrease from £4.9 billion to £4.3 billion, a reduction of £0.6 billion or 11.9%, compared to last year.

The amounts sought does not, as yet, include any additional funding for new commitments made since the Main Estimate was published, such as free school meals during the summer holidays, the £1 billion catch up tutoring and support fund announced on 19 June, and the new school rebuilding plan. If, as seems likely, these require additional funding, rather than simply reallocations of existing plans, resources will be added through a Supplementary Estimate, published towards the end of the financial year.

The Government has recently begun a phased reopening of schools after they have been closed to the vast majority of pupils since 23 March due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Schools have remained open to children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils (those with an Education Health and Care plan, or a social worker, or are looked after by the local authority). However, the low attendance rate of vulnerable pupils and survey evidence of unequal home learning environments have raised concerns of the risk that the attainment gap might widen.

Universities are extremely concerned about the impact that the Coronavirus pandemic will have on the finances of the sector. A potential loss in income from international students and a reduction in recruitment of home students could cause significant financial problems for many providers.

1.1 Introduction

The government published its plans for 2020-21 government spending in its Main Estimates for 2020-21 on 4 May 2020. These will be put to Parliament for approval following the Estimates day debates in early July.

On 23 June the Backbench Business Committee considered bids for Estimates day debates and agreed that one of these debates in July, before Estimates are authorised, should be on the “spending of the Department for Education on closing the disadvantage gap and support for left-behind children”, a proposal put forward by Robert Halfon, Chair of the Commons Education Committee.

In the meantime, all government departments have been advanced money through a “Vote on Account” approved by Parliament in March and have access to further funds if needed from the government’s Contingencies fund.

1.2 DFE’s Main Estimate for 2020-21

The Department for Education provides funding for early years, schools, child social care, Further Education and Higher Education, with grants to schools making up around two thirds of the departments’ total day-to-day spending.

The spending plans set out in DFE’s Main Estimate for 2020-21 include several separate spending limits, which Parliament must approve before the full year’s budget can be made available to the department. These are:

- The **Resource Departmental Expenditure Limit**, or Resource DEL covering DFE’s day to day spending, including grants to fund schools’ running costs including staffing;
- The **Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit**, covering the costs of investment in facilities and infrastructure for schools and other educational institutions;
- Other budget limits, known as Resource and Capital Annually Managed Expenditure, cover costs and repayment of student loans.

The Department for Education proposes a total **Resource DEL of £72,071.8 million**. Excluding student loans, where large provisions for forecast losses are made at the end of each year which distort year on year comparisons, DFE’s day to day spending within this limit is set to increase by **£3,901 million or 6.2%**, from £63,431 million last year to **£67,332 million** in 2020-21.

The increase reflects:

- £3,147 million extra for schools (+6%);
- £358 million extra for further education (+7.3%);
- £352 million extra for Education and Skills Funding Agency (+15.2%), the increase primarily relating to apprenticeships; and

- £43 million extra for social care and disadvantage (+11.5%) primarily to address Children's Social Care, SEND and Alternative Provision.

The amount sought does not, as yet, include any additional funding for new commitments made since the Main Estimate was published, such as free school meals during the summer holidays and the £1 billion catch up tutoring and support fund announced on 19 June. If, as seems likely, these require additional funding, rather than simply reallocations of existing plans, resources will be added through a Supplementary Estimate, published towards the end of the financial year.

DFE's **Capital DEL** covering investment is set to **decrease** from £4,912.3 million to **£4,327.2 million**, a reduction of £585 million or 11.9%, compared to last year. This is largely caused by:

- A reduction of £475 million (-21%) in capital spending for schools. DFE says costs of capital programmes vary between years according to the status of construction and level of need;
- A reduction of £196 million (-12%) in capital early years spending; and
- Increases in capital spending of £89 million for further education and £41 million for higher education.

Again, commitments by the government to invest in a new school rebuilding plan were made after the Main Estimate was published, so any additional funding provided for 2020-21 will need to be added through a Supplementary Estimate later in the year.

2. Impact of Coronavirus pandemic

2.1 School closures

Schools in all parts of the UK were closed to most children by the start of the week commencing Monday 23 March 2020. In England, some schools remained open where necessary for the children of critical workers, and vulnerable children, including:

- Those with a social worker
- Looked-after children
- Those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan because they have complex special educational needs.

In his [address to the nation](#) on 10 May 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that if the Government's conditions were met, more children and young people could begin returning to school from 1 June 2020, at the earliest.¹

The DfE published [further guidance](#) on 11 May 2020, most recently updated on 16 June. Initially, and for mainstream settings, the focus would be on children in the following year groups:

- Nursery
- Reception (aged 4 to 5)
- Year 1 (aged 5 to 6)
- Year 6 (aged 10 to 11 – in the final year of primary schooling in two-tier systems).
- Year 10 (aged 14 to 15 - the year before GCSE or equivalent exams)
- Year 12 (aged 16 to 17 - the year before A level or equivalent exams)

The DfE subsequently said it would encourage middle schools² to open to year 6 pupils first, “to ensure national parity for children in this year group.”³

Special schools would work toward a phased return, but without a focus on specific year groups.

Attendance rates in England

The DfE has [published](#) national **estimates** of the number and proportion of children attending schools in person since 23 March

¹ [PM address to the nation on coronavirus](#), 10 May 2020.

² Some areas of England have three-tier systems of schooling, with first, middle, and upper/ higher schools. Middle schools typically cater for pupils aged 9 to 13.

³ Department for Education, '[Actions for education and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020](#)', updated 1 June 2020.

based on the daily attendance figures which [schools have provided](#) to them. This data is for all schools and colleges in England.

The published figures are **estimates** because they have been adjusted for non-responses using certain assumptions. Lower response rates from schools can make these estimates less accurate.⁴

As of Thursday 25 June 2020 (the most recent data available):⁵

- Around 1,483,000 pupils attended schools in England. This was an estimated 15.6% of pupils that would normally attend. This was an increase from an estimated 12.2% the previous week.
- Around 17,800 schools were open to nursery, reception, year 1 **or** year 6 (an estimated 89% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was an increase from 78% the previous week.
- Around 4,300 schools were open to year 10 **or** year 12 (an estimated 74% of the schools that are normally open to these year groups). This was an increase from 60% the previous week.
- Attendance rates were highest in year 6 with around 41% of all year 6 pupils attending, followed by reception (36%), year 1 (34%), and year 10 and year 12 (13% respectively).
- Around 23,300 schools in total were open (an estimated 93% of schools that are normally open). This was an increase from 92% the previous week.

Additional pupil attendance data is available in the Library briefing paper [Coronavirus and schools: FAQs](#).

Attendance rates of vulnerable pupils in England

The proportion of pupils attending schools with an Education Health and Care plan (EHCP) or have a social worker have been published between 23 March and 25 June.

However due to a methodological change on 27 March like for like comparisons cannot be made over the entire period. In addition, Government guidance changed for pupil attendance as of 1 June (encouraged certain year groups in primary schools to attend) and 15 June (encouraged some face to face contact for pupils in year 10 and 12).

Overall the proportion of pupils attending schools with an EHCP or have a social worker have exceeded the average attendance rate of all pupils but has remained low (the highest rate was on 23 June at 24%).

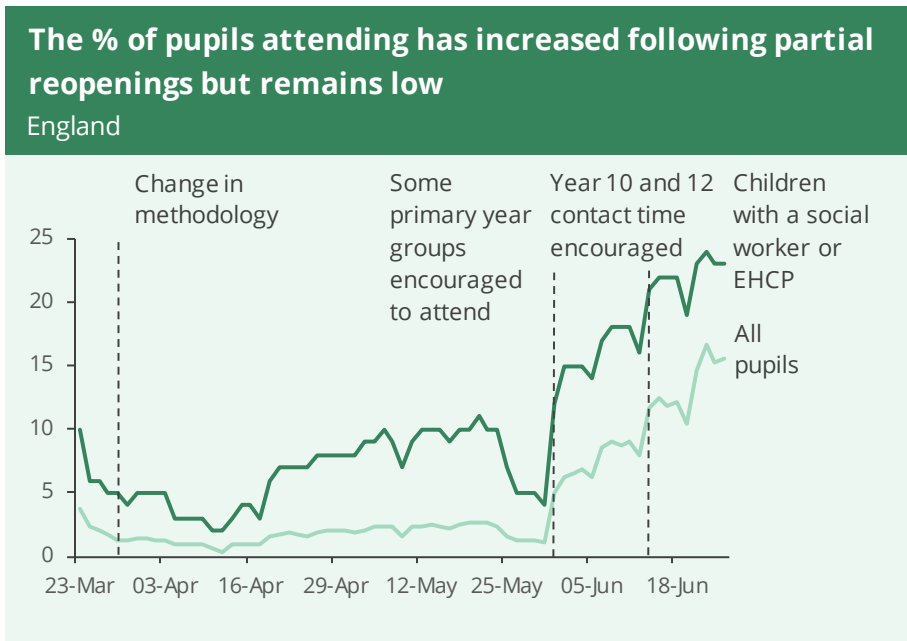
As of Thursday 25 June 2020 (the most recent data available):⁶

⁴ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 28 May 2020, DfE \(p4\)](#)

⁵ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 23 March to 25 June 2020, DfE](#)

⁶ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 23 March to 25 June 2020, DfE](#)

- Around 116,000 pupils with an EHCP or social worker attended schools in England. This was an estimated 23% of pupils with and EHCP or social worker which was an increase from an estimated 22% the previous week.
- Around 114,000 pupils classified as otherwise vulnerable attended schools.
- Around 90% of special schools were open with an estimated pupil attendance of around 20%. Around 78% of special post 16 settings were open with an estimated pupil attendance of around 63%.
- Around 90% of alternative provision settings were open with an estimated pupil attendance of around 13-21%.



Notes: All figures are estimates because they have been adjusted for non-responses. Caution should be taken for the results of 1 May, 13 May, 15 May which experienced technical issues with the DfE sign-in. The methodology for the adjustment changed from Friday 27 March. From 1 June reception, year 1, and year 6 were encouraged to attend. From 15 June schools have been encouraged to provide some face-to-face contact time in school for those in year 10 and year 12. Caution should be taken when making comparisons before and after the breaks in the series.

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): attendance in education and early years settings: 23 March to 25 June 2020, DfE](#)

2.2 Catchup fund

On 19 June 2020 the Government announced a [£1bn programme](#) to help children catchup lost learning time during the 2020/21 academic year, consisting of £650m paid to schools to fund small group tuition, and £350m on a National Tutoring Programme (NTP).⁷

⁷ Department for Education, [Billion pound Covid catch-up plan to tackle impact of lost teaching time](#), 19 June 2020

The [Education Endowment Foundation](#) and the [Sutton Trust](#) are part of the NTP and have published information on their role.⁸ The EEF states that:

The National Tutoring Programme (NTP) consists of two pillars;

- **NTP Partners:** through NTP Partners, schools will be able to access heavily subsidised tutoring from an approved list of tuition partners. These organisations – which will all be subject to quality, safeguarding and evaluation standards – will be given support and funding to reach as many disadvantaged pupils as possible.
- **NTP Coaches:** through NTP Coaches, trained graduates will be employed by schools in the most disadvantaged areas to provide intensive catch-up support to their pupils, allowing teachers in these schools to focus on their classrooms.

2.3 School capital funding

On [29 June 2020](#) the Government announced what the Education Secretary described in the House as “a 10-year, multi-wave rebuilding programme for schools,” to replace “poor-condition and ageing school buildings, with modern, energy-efficient designs.”⁹

The Education Secretary announced £1 billion in capital funding to be spent on 50 initial projects, with work due to begin in autumn 2021. Details of these projects, and a wider repairs programme, would be announced following the Spending Review.

The Secretary of State also announced £560 million of additional condition funding for the school system this year to help support essential maintenance projects, on top of the £1.4 billion already provided for school maintenance in financial year 2020-21.¹⁰

Trends in school capital spending since 2009-10 in England

The real level of capital spending¹¹ by the Department of Education (DfE) fell from £9.0 billion in 2009-10 to a low of £4.7 billion in 2013-14. Since then the trend has fluctuated somewhat, before declining again to £5.1 billion in 2019-20 (this is an estimated figure subject to revision).¹² Between 2009-10 and 2019-20, capital spending declined by 33% in cash terms and 44% after adjusting for inflation.

The spending plans set out in the DfE’s Main Estimate for 2020-21 proposes capital spending of £4.3 billion. This figure would be worth

⁸ Education Endowment Foundation, [National Tutoring Programme](#), 19 June 2020; Sutton Trust, [National Tutoring Programme Launched to Support Pupils Across England](#), 19 June 2020

⁹ [HC Deb 29 Jun 2020 c2WS](#)

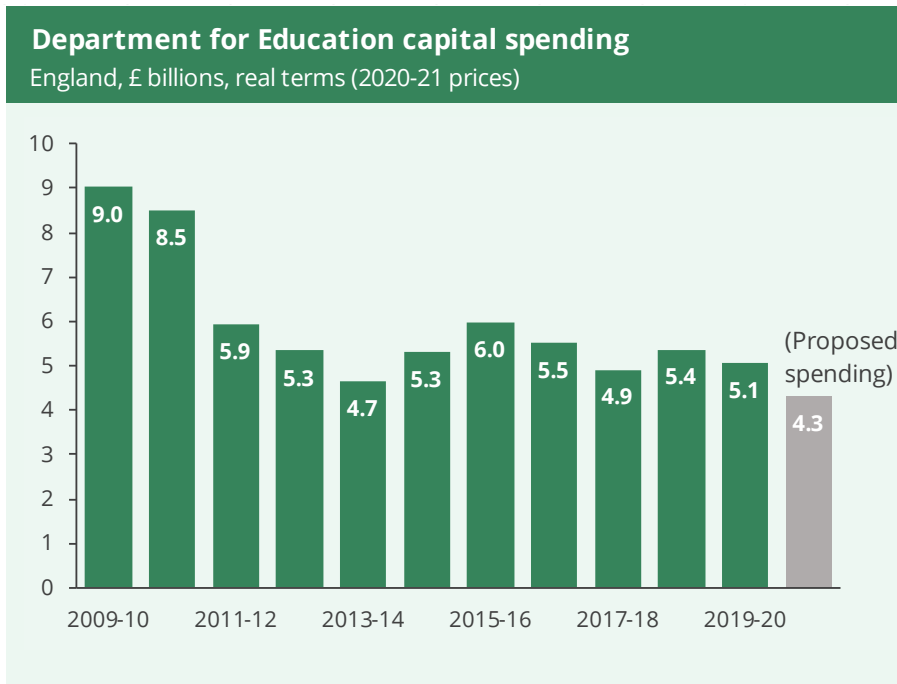
¹⁰ As above

¹¹ Includes some non-school spending

¹² *Figures prior to 2019-20* [PESA: various years, HM Treasury](#) (Table 1.8); *Figures for 2019-20 and 2020-21* [Estimates Memorandum: 2020-21, DfE](#); real terms ([2020-21 prices](#))

42% less than the 2009-10 level in cash terms and 52% less after adjusting for inflation.¹³

The recent commitments by the government to invest in a new school rebuilding plan outlined in the section above were made after the Main Estimate was published. If, as seems likely, these require additional funding, rather than simply reallocations of existing plans, resources will be added through a Supplementary Estimate, published towards the end of the financial year.



Note: real terms (2020-21 prices), figures between 2009-10 and 2018-19 are final, 2019-20 is an estimated figure subject to revision, 2020-21 is proposed spending taken from the Estimates Memorandum.

Sources: *Figures prior to 2020-21* [PESA: various years, HM Treasury](#) (Table 1.8); *2020-21 figures* [Estimates Memorandum: 2020-21, DfE](#)

[GDP Deflators at market prices, and money GDP: June 2020, HM Treasury](#)

2.4 Attainment gap

GCSE (Key Stage 4) attainment in England

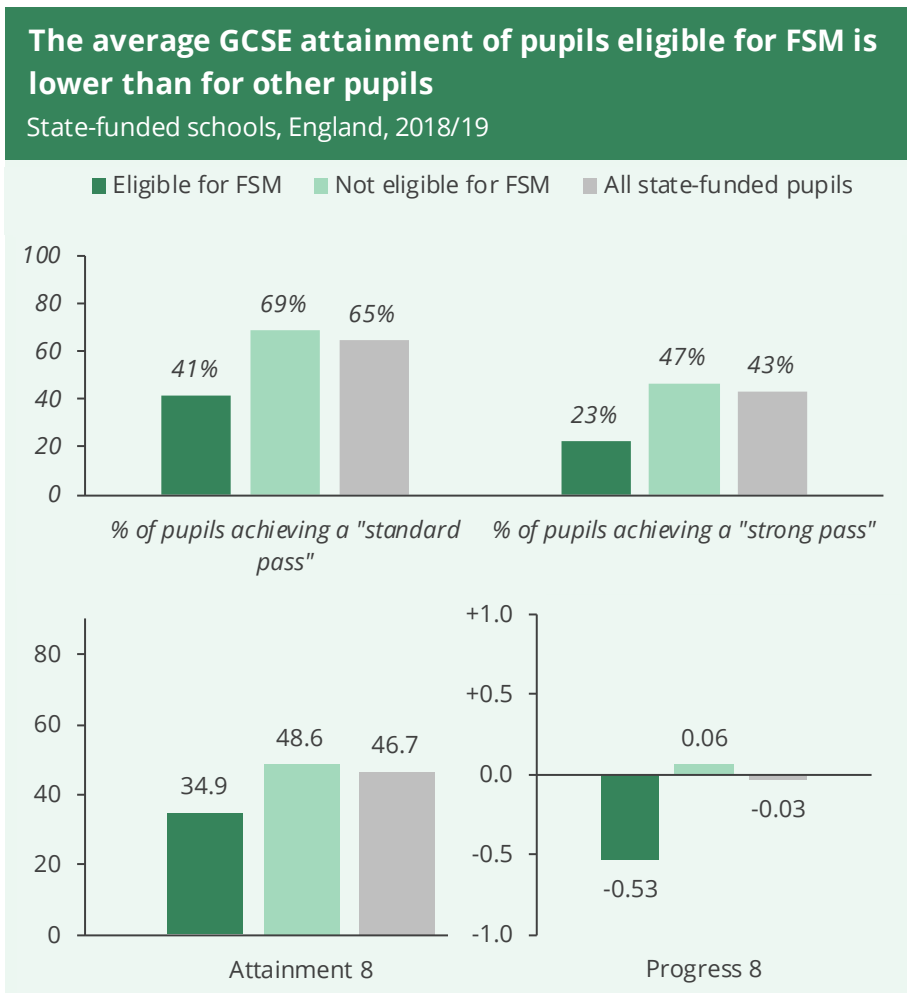
There are several measures of GCSE attainment, and therefore ways to measure the attainment gap between deprived pupils and non-deprived pupils.

The charts below show that in 2018/19 the average GCSE attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)¹⁴ is much lower than for other pupils across each of the four key attainment measures.

¹³ *Figures prior to 2019-20* [PESA: various years, HM Treasury](#) (Table 1.8); *Figures for 2019-20 and 2020-21* [Estimates Memorandum: 2020-21, DfE](#); real terms ([2020-21 prices](#))

¹⁴ A pupil is recorded in the school census as eligible for free school meals if they meet the [eligibility criteria](#) and their parents make a claim

1. [Progress 8](#) aims to capture the academic progress a pupil makes from the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) to the end of KS4. For example, a school with a Progress 8 score of -0.25 has pupils that on average achieved a quarter of a grade less per subject than other pupils with similar attainment at KS2.
2. [Attainment 8](#) is an average score based on a pupil's best eight grades in a group of GCSEs. The maximum a pupil can achieve is 90 points if they get A* grades in eight of these GCSEs. One point difference is equivalent to one grade difference in one qualification.
3. Achieving 9-4 grades (roughly comparable to A*-C) in English and Maths GCSE is known as a standard pass.
4. Achieving 9-5 grades (roughly comparable to A*-B) in English and Maths GCSE is known as a strong pass.



Source: [Key Stage 4 attainment: 2018/19. DfE \(National Characteristics Tables, Characteristics Summary\)](#)

Progress 8 attainment data broken down by FSM status and region in the table below, shows that pupils eligible for FSM in London make the most progress by some way (albeit still negative) compared to pupils

with similar attainment at Key Stage 2, while pupils eligible for FSM in the North East make the least progress.

Progress 8 attainment broken down by FSM status and region			
State-funded schools, England, 2018/19			
	Eligible for FSM	Not eligible for FSM	All state-funded pupils
North East	-0.76	-0.13	-0.24
South East	-0.74	+0.07	-0.01
North West	-0.72	-0.07	-0.18
South West	-0.71	+0.02	-0.06
East Midlands	-0.60	+0.02	-0.06
East of England	-0.55	+0.06	0.00
Yorkshire and The Humber	-0.49	+0.06	-0.02
West Midlands	-0.45	+0.01	-0.06
London	-0.15	+0.31	+0.22
Outer London	-0.19	+0.32	+0.24
Inner London	-0.10	+0.29	+0.18
England	-0.53	+0.06	-0.03

Note: Regions ranked from lowest FSM Progress 8 score to highest

Source: [Key Stage 4 attainment: 2018/19, DfE \(National Characteristics Tables, Characteristics Summary\)](#)

National Curriculum Assessments (Key Stage 2) attainment in England

There are several different measures of attainment for the National Curriculum Assessments (commonly known as SATs). One of the main measures is the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading, writing, and maths.

This is where a pupil must achieve a scaled score of 100 or more in reading and maths and an outcome of “reaching the expected standard” or “working at greater depth” in the writing Teacher Assessment. This measure does not take into account previous attainment.

In 2019, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)¹⁵ that achieved the expected standard was around 48%, this compared to 69% of pupils not eligible for FSM and the national average of 65%.

The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard broken down by FSM status and region in the table below shows that as with GCSE attainment, pupils eligible for FSM in London have the highest attainment of pupils eligible for FSM. The proportion of FSM pupils achieving the expected standard in the East of England was the lowest out of the regions in England.

¹⁵ A pupil is recorded in the school census as eligible for free school meals if they meet the [eligibility criteria](#) and their parents make a claim

% of pupils achieving the expected standard broken down by FSM status and region			
State-funded schools, England, 2019			
	Eligible for FSM	Not eligible for FSM	All state-funded pupils
East of England	43%	67%	64%
South West	43%	67%	64%
South East	43%	70%	66%
East Midlands	44%	67%	63%
Yorkshire and The Humber	45%	68%	63%
North West	47%	69%	65%
West Midlands	47%	67%	63%
North East	50%	72%	67%
London	57%	74%	71%
Outer London	55%	74%	71%
Inner London	61%	74%	71%
England	48%	69%	65%

Note: Regions ranked from lowest FSM attainment to highest

Source: [Key Stage 2: 2019, DfE \(National Local Authority and Regional Tables\)](#)

Further resources

The following reports provide background information on the attainment gap:

- The [APPG on Social Mobility Inquiry into the Regional Attainment Gap](#), February 2019
- Education Endowment Foundation, [The Attainment Gap](#), January 2018. The [EEF report](#) drew attention to the gap growing wider during children's years in education
- Education Policy Institute, [Closing the Gap](#), August 2017 (used by EEF as part of the basis for their work) drew attention to reductions in the attainment gap over the previous decade
- The Social Mobility Commission's 2017 report [State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain](#). Chapter 3 discusses schools.

2.5 Survey evidence about differences in home learning

UCL Institute of Education

The [UCL Institute of Education](#) analysed survey data about home schooling from a sample of UK households which included 4,559 children. The survey was carried out in the last two weeks of April. The results were then adjusted to provide UK wide **estimates**.

The survey found the average amount of schoolwork that pupils were doing in a day was low (two and a half hours).

The survey also found large differences between pupils' home learning experiences when broken down by free school meal (FSM) status.

For example, an estimated 25% of pupils eligible for FSM spent no time or less than one hour on school work in a day compared to 18% of pupils not eligible. In addition, an estimated 11% of pupils eligible for FSM spent four hours or more on school work in a day compared to 19% of pupils not eligible.¹⁶

The survey also found an estimated 20% of FSM pupils had no access to a computer at home. This compares to 7% for other children.¹⁷

Teacher Tapp

[Teacher Tapp](#) have asked a range of survey questions to a sample of around 7,000 teachers several times per week during the school closures. The results are then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

The survey found very large differences between teachers' perceptions of state and private sector pupils' home learning environments, and also the average amount of online learning time.¹⁸

For example, 5% of private school teachers thought that more than 20% of the children in their class did not have access to an electronic device for learning (as of 25 March). In contrast, 15% of state-funded teachers thought the same.

In addition, 13% of private school teachers thought that their pupils were learning less than one hour per day (as of 27 March). In contrast, 42% of state-funded school teachers thought the same.

The following charts show that there were also large differences in responses within the state-funded sector when schools are broken down by deprivation.¹⁹

For example, in the least deprived state-funded schools 4% of teachers thought that more than 20% of the children in their class did not have access to an electronic device (as of 25 March). In contrast, 26% of teachers in the most deprived schools thought the same.

In addition, in the least deprived state-funded schools 27% of teachers thought that their pupils were learning less than one hour per day (as of 27 March). In contrast, 57% of teachers in the most deprived schools thought the same.

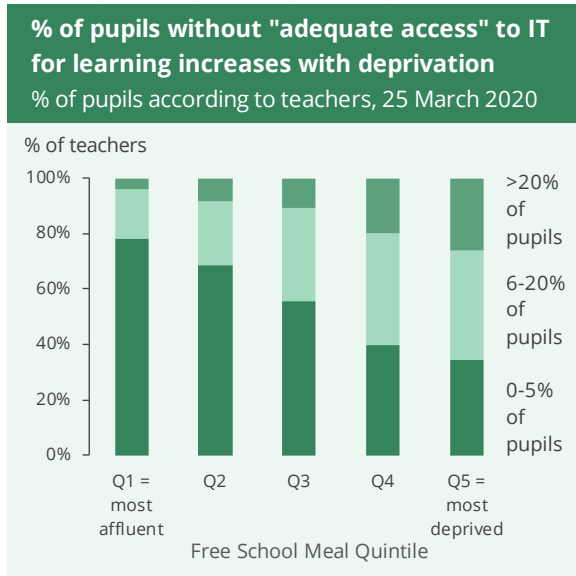
Some disadvantaged pupils without digital devices or internet access are eligible for Government support. Further details about this scheme are available [here](#).

¹⁶ UCL Institute of Education, [Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty](#), p19

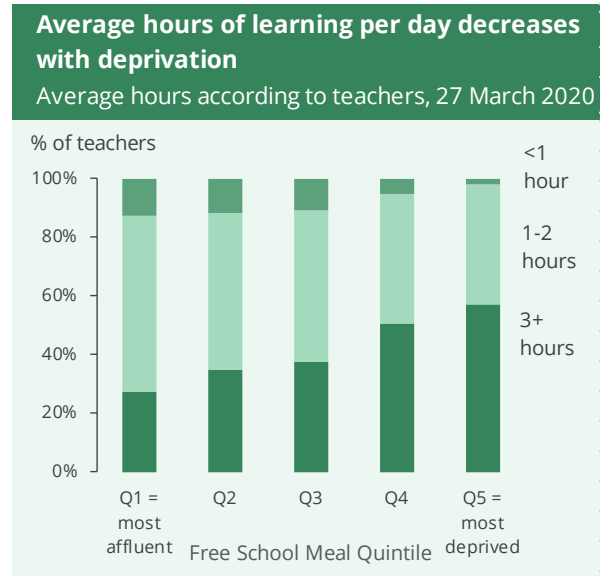
¹⁷ UCL Institute of Education, [Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty](#), p10

¹⁸ NA responses have been excluded

¹⁹ As above.



Notes: All figures are estimates
6,877 teachers responded to this survey question
NA responses have been excluded (3-5% of sample)
Source: [Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools: Q3144 25 March, Teacher Tapp \(Google doc\)](#)



Notes: All figures are estimates
2,068 teachers responded to this survey question
NA responses have been excluded (4-7% of sample)
Source: [Monitoring Covid-19 readiness in schools: Q3143 27 March, Teacher Tapp \(Google doc\)](#)

Institute for Fiscal Studies

Between 29 April and 12 May, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) surveyed around 4,000 parents with children aged 4-15 about their home learning activities and resources. The results were then adjusted to provide national **estimates**.

The IFS survey found large differences between state and private school parents' responses about the provision of online learning resources from schools. The results also showed large differences within the state sector when broken down by family deprivation levels.²⁰

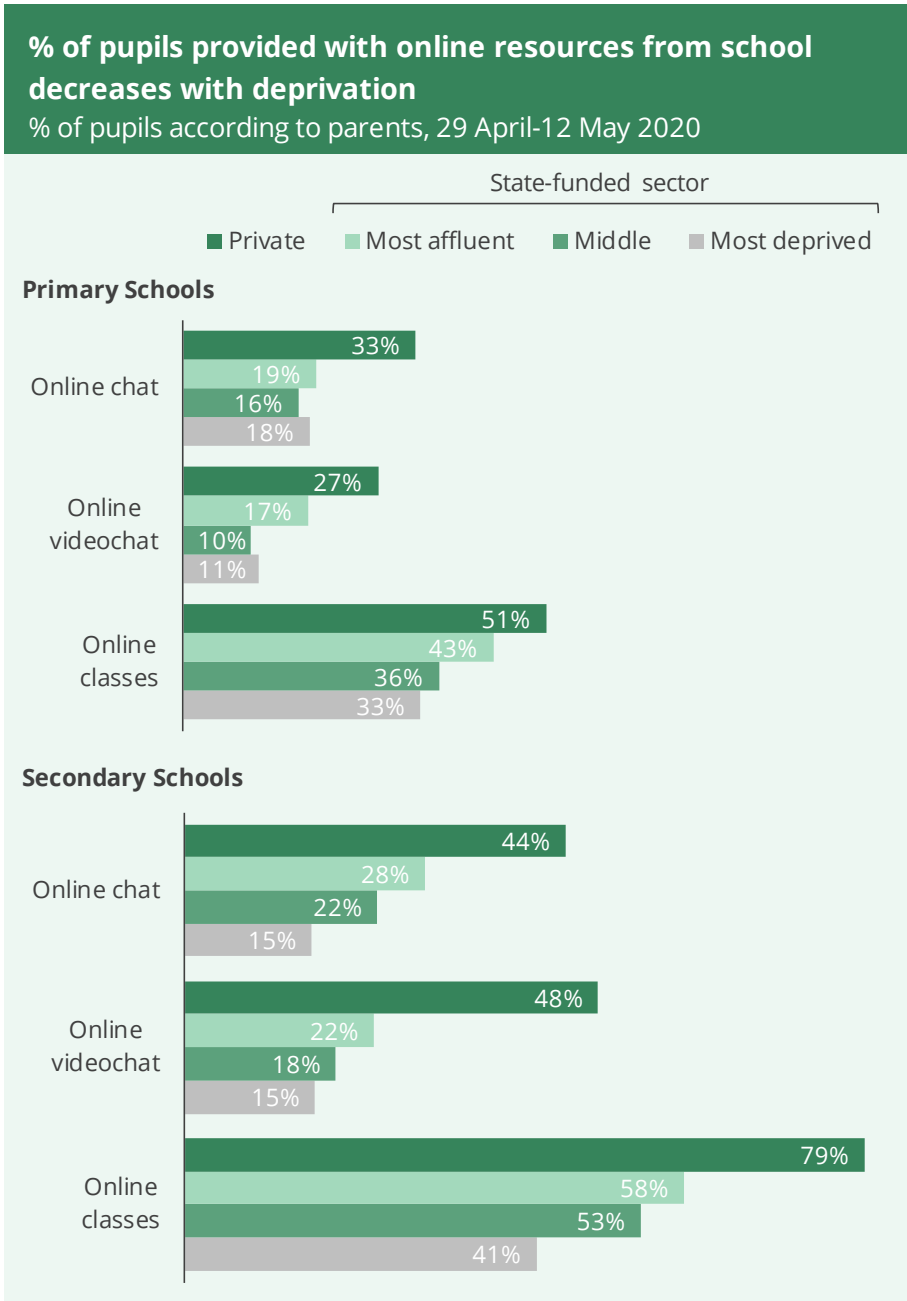
For example, the proportion of parents that report their child's primary school has provided online classes²¹ (regardless of whether or not the child has attended them) is 51% for children attending private schools, 43% for the most affluent in state-funded schools and 33% for the most deprived in state-funded schools.

The differences are more pronounced in secondary schools. For example, the proportion of parents that report their child's school has provided online classes is 79% for children attending private schools, 58% for the most affluent in state-funded schools and 41% for the most deprived in state-funded schools.

The IFS concluded from the survey results findings overall that "school closures are almost certain to increase educational inequalities".²²

²¹ There may be differences in the way parents from different groups interpret what is meant by 'online classes'. Some schools are offering short online catch-ups while others are running full lessons.

²² IFS, [Learning during the lockdown](#), 18 May 2020, p3



Notes: All figures are estimates based on a survey sample of 3,091 primary parents and 1,554 secondary school parents. Parents were asked, 'Which of the following activities has [child]'s school provided while schools are closed? Please tick all that apply.' Deprivation quintiles are based on equivalised pre-pandemic family earnings, only most affluent, middle, and most deprived quintiles are shown here.

Source: [Learning during the lockdown](#): 18 May 2020, IFS ("Underlying data", Fig4)

2.6 School meal voucher scheme

The Department for Education (DfE) [announced](#) on 31 March 2020 that children in England who are usually eligible for free school meals but are at home would be eligible for weekly £15 vouchers to spend in supermarkets while schools are closed because of coronavirus.²³

²³ [Voucher scheme launches for schools providing free school meals](#), Department for Education press release, 31 March 2020

[Guidance for schools](#) on the voucher scheme sets out that, if a school catering service cannot provide meals or food parcels, an alternative should be offered, and the voucher scheme had been set up for this purpose.²⁴

The voucher scheme is funded centrally by the DfE. The vouchers should be made available to the adult with caring responsibility for that child.

The scheme operates through the Edenred portal. The guidance states that schools will receive an activation email and then be able to generate vouchers:

You can:

1. order a single voucher to cover a longer time frame, for example, £45 to support one eligible child over 3 weeks
2. order a single voucher to cover more than one eligible child within the same household, for example, £90 to support three eligible children over 2 weeks
3. set a weekly £15 rolling voucher

Once you have confirmed the voucher's value, you can either:

1. send an eCode directly to the parent or carers of the pupils(s) eligible for free school meals - they will need to choose an eGift card from a range of supermarkets
2. select an eGift card on the parent or carer's behalf, and print and post the eGift card to them
3. select an eGift card on the parent or carer's behalf, print the eGift card and arrange for families to collect it

An alternative approach would be to send an eGift card for a particular supermarket:

You can choose a supermarket on the family's behalf and send the eGift card to the parent or carer. The family will be able to redeem the eGift card as soon as it arrives. You should take this approach if the family receiving the voucher does not have access to an email address or the internet.

If you choose this option, you should think carefully about which shops and supermarkets are most convenient for families to access - if possible, ask the families.

The scheme is available through Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Aldi, McColl's, Company Shop Group, and celand, including The Food Warehouse Stores.

Concerns have been raised during the lockdown period about the operation of the voucher scheme, with problems reported including families not receiving vouchers and instances of the vouchers not working at checkouts.²⁵

²⁴ Department for Education, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): free school meals guidance for schools](#), 31 March 2020

²⁵ BBC News, [Coronavirus: Families still waiting for free school meal vouchers](#), 30 April 2020; BBC News, [Coronavirus: 'Humiliation' as school meal vouchers fail at till](#), 7 May 2020; TES, [Edenred blames 'poor data' for 40k missing FSM vouchers](#), 4 June 2020

Vouchers during the school holidays

Easter and May half term holidays

It was originally announced that the vouchers would operate during term-time only. [Concerns were raised](#) about this, such as by Kevin Courtney, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, who stated that “families on low incomes will need access to school meals during this [Easter] fortnight, particularly as food banks are seriously overstretched and it is much harder to shop affordably at the moment.”²⁶

In the daily Number 10 press briefing on 4 April 2020, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Michael Gove, announced that [the position had changed](#) and that the vouchers would be available over the Easter holidays.²⁷ On 7 April, the DfE [guidance to schools](#) was amended to reflect this change.

Questions were raised in Parliament about whether the scheme would be extended to the May half term and summer holidays. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the DfE responded:

Vicky Ford: Ordinarily, provision for free school meals (FSM) is during term-time only. However, during the Easter holidays, the department met the costs of offering FSM to eligible pupils not attending school during term-time weeks. This was in recognition of the unprecedented levels of disruption and uncertainty for schools during this time.

These are rapidly developing circumstances. We will continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.²⁸

In evidence to the Education Committee on 27 May 2020, however, the Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, stated that “the cost of the voucher scheme will continue to be met by the DfE over [May] half term.”²⁹

Summer holidays

Attention subsequently focused on whether support will be provided during the summer holidays. On [9 June 2020](#) the Education Secretary told the House:

We are looking not only at the summer but much more over the longer term. We have never traditionally provided free school meals all the way through the summer, but the DWP has put in an extra £6.5 billion to support those families who are most vulnerable. We will continue to work with the DWP, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to continue to support those families who are most vulnerable.³⁰

²⁶ [Coronavirus: Pupils won't get free school meal vouchers during Easter holidays](#), Schools Week 31 March 2020

²⁷ [Free school meal vouchers WILL now be available over Easter](#), Schools Week, 4 March 2020

²⁸ [PO 47497, 20 May 2020](#)

²⁹ Schools Week, [Rotas for primary pupils, U-turn on FSM vouchers and PPE concerns – Gibb at education committee](#), 27 May 2020

³⁰ [HC Deb 9 Jun 2020 c184-185](#)

The issue of support over the summer holidays gained further prominence on 15 June 2020, when the Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford published an [open letter to MPs](#) in support of extending the voucher scheme over the summer holidays,³¹ followed by a further [article in the Times](#).³²

The Department for Education published a blog on 15 June 2020 reasserting that the [scheme would not continue](#) during the summer break. The piece drew attention to a new [£63 million local authority welfare assistance scheme](#) that has been announced to provide help to those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials during the pandemic.³³³⁴

On 16 June 2020, however, the Education Secretary announced in the House that the Government would provide additional funding to enable children who are eligible for free school meals to claim a [six-week voucher](#) over the summer holidays.³⁵

2.7 Provision of laptops, routers etc

[On 19 April](#) the Department for Education announced that it would be providing laptops, tablets, and 4G routers to disadvantaged children while schools are closed.

The DfE published [a progress data release](#) on the delivery of routers and laptops on 1 July 2020.

As of 30 June, 202,212 laptops had been delivered or dispatched to LAs or trusts and 47,416 4G wireless routers had been delivered or dispatched.

A PQ response from the Schools Minister had previously noted that:

Nick Gibb: [...] Local authorities and academy trusts are best place[d] to identify and prioritise children and young people who need devices. The Department is agreeing the number of devices allocated to each local authority and academy trust based on its estimates of the number of eligible children that do not have access to a device.

[\[PQ 47479, 20 May 2020\]](#)

The Education Secretary told the House on 9 June:

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend will be aware that we are already in the process of rolling out IT equipment across the school estate, as well as to the most vulnerable children. Some 100,000 of those laptops have already been distributed to the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged children. We took the decision to ensure that children who have social workers are prioritised over and above schools. A further 75,000 computers will be distributed to schools in the coming weeks. We are on

³¹ Marcus Rashford, [Open letter to MPs](#), 15 June 2020

³² Times, [Marcus Rashford: Ending child poverty is a bigger trophy than any in football](#), 16 June 2020

³³ Department for Education, [Free school meal availability](#), 15 June 2020

³⁴ MHLCG, Defra, DWP, [£63 million for local authorities to assist those struggling to afford food and other essentials](#), 11 June 2020

³⁵ [HC Deb 16 Jun 2020 c715](#)

schedule to distribute the full 230,000 computers over the coming month.

[\[HC Deb 9 June 2020 c180\]](#)

2.8 Other Covid-19 related funds/projects

Several other funds and projects have been established during the coronavirus epidemic.

- The Government has established an [Exceptional Costs Fund](#) for schools for specific costs during the pandemic, up to £75,000 depending on school size:
 - Increased premises related costs
 - support for free school meals for eligible children who are not attending school
 - additional cleaning³⁶
- An [adoption support fund](#) of £8m, drawn from the £45 million 2020-21 budget that was announced by the Education Secretary in December,³⁷ for families whose adopted children were struggling on account of the virus, has been established by the Government.
- The NSPCC has received [£1.6m in funding](#) from Government to support its helpline.³⁸
- The [Oak National Academy](#) has been established by teachers to support schools in providing lessons to pupils online. The DfE will fund the academy to stay open in the 2020-21 academic year.³⁹
- A [£12m fund for vulnerable children](#), for projects coping the increased risk some children and young people are facing as they stay at home.⁴⁰

2.9 Impact on those leaving and trying to enter the workplace/HE/FE

It is estimated that there will be around 800,000 UK school leavers and graduates this year. A report by the Resolution Foundation, [Class of 2020 Education leavers in the current crisis](#) (May 2020) suggested that youth unemployment in the UK could rise by 640,000 this year - taking the total above one million and that the impact may cause long-term damage to leaver's career and pay prospects:

A 6.1 percentage point hike in the unemployment rate at the point of leaving full-time education (the change forecast by the OBR between Q2 2019 and Q2 2020) entails a 13 per cent lower likelihood of a graduate being in employment three years after having left education. For those with mid-level (some higher education or an A level equivalent education) and lower-level (GCSE-equivalent or below) qualifications, these figures are 27

³⁶ Department for Education, [School funding: exceptional costs associated with coronavirus \(COVID-19\) for the period from March to July 2020](#), 24 June 2020

³⁷ Department for Education, [More funding to boost adoption support](#), 1 July 2020

³⁸ NSPCC, [£1.6 million funding announced for the NSPCC Helpline](#), 19 April 2020

³⁹ Oak National Academy, [Continuing Oak next year](#), June 2020

⁴⁰ Department for Education, [Multi-million support for vulnerable children during COVID-19](#), 24 April 2020

and 37 per cent, respectively. In other words, the current crisis may reduce the employment chances of lower-skilled young adults leaving education by more than a third, even years down the line when the direct economic effects of the crisis will (hopefully) have abated.

For those managing to find work, pay is expected to be depressed as well: two years on from leaving education, real hourly graduate pay is forecast to be, on average, 7 per cent lower. For leavers with mid- and lower-level qualifications, average hourly pay is forecast to be 9 and 19 per cent lower than had unemployment not risen, respectively. p4

The Association of Colleges (AOC) has predicted that half of this year's school and college leavers - around 100,000 16 to 25-year-olds - would struggle to find "meaningful employment" as a result of Covid-19 and they have asked the Government to [guarantee access](#) to education this autumn to every young person who wants to start a course. It also warned there would be fewer jobs and apprenticeships for this year's school and college leavers:

For this year's school and college leavers there are likely to be fewer job and apprenticeship opportunities and there will be major challenges in re-starting education and training after months of lockdown. In a depressed labour market, they will also be competing against recent graduates and more experienced staff who have lost their jobs.

AoC's Chief Executive, David Hughes, has asked Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, calling on him to deliver a new 'September Promise' guaranteeing access to high quality education or training places this Autumn to every young person who wants one.

The Association of Colleges estimates that there are:

- 30,000 16 and 17 year olds in England who would usually expect to start an apprenticeship or work-based learning programme in the coming academic year who will now need alternate provision
- 70,000 18 and 19 year olds in England who would usually be headed for employer-based training, or the labour market who will now need alternative provision
- Other pressures on available state-funded 16+ education places, including a rising population of young people, potential increases in transfers from private to state provision, and the inevitable space constraints created by social distancing.

AoC is calling for this September Promise to particularly target those from low income families, and those who would normally be starting apprenticeships in September

Evidence from past recessions shows that a larger proportion of potential leavers try to stay on in education during an economic downturn, so we may expect more leavers to enter tertiary education or training, or to start postgraduate study. The Resolution Foundation report states that some students may face challenges in trying to stay on in education:

The challenges in helping young people to stay on in education are diverse. Many 16-17-year-olds planning to do an apprenticeship have had their hopes dashed, while some 18-year-olds may only now be thinking about attending university and may struggle to apply for autumn entry at such a late stage. 18-24-year-olds in England may struggle to study in further education on a full-time basis because, unlike their counterparts in higher education, they do not have access to any maintenance support. And most young people, across education levels, will have missed out on at least some learning. p5

GCSEs and A level examinations were cancelled this year and grades are being awarded by teacher assessment - some students are concerned about the impact that this may have on their final grades and the implications for entering tertiary education. [Government guidance](#) has asked universities to use flexibilities over entry to courses in cases where external students were unable to be given grades by examination centres.

The Association of Colleges report, [Rebuild: A skills led recovery plan](#), further predicts and increased demand for college places and calls for an extra £3.6 billion to upskill the 764,000 people most at risk post Covid 19 - including young people needing support to catch up with learning following lockdown:

The Association of Colleges warns of increased demand for college places as high unemployment crowds young people out of the labour market; large numbers of young people needing support to catch up as a result of lost learning in lockdown; reductions in apprenticeship places, a large number of apprentice redundancies and a shortage of new places for apprentices; and large numbers of adults requiring training to help them move from struggling sectors into those that recover more quickly, or even grow.

A £3.6 billion package of incentives for business, support for students and investment in colleges would help the 760,000 people most at risk of suffering economically in this recession. It would: guarantee a high quality, education or training place for every 16 to 18 year old, funded to meet their needs and the learning lost; offer a suite of work focussed training programmes, including expanded traineeships and apprenticeships designed to get young people into jobs as soon as they become available; provide support for adults who lose their jobs to train or retrain flexibly up to higher level technical / professional level, aimed at getting them back into the workforce as quickly as possible, with additional training to manage their transition once back in work.

3. Coronavirus-related support for universities

3.1 Financial impact on universities

Universities are extremely concerned about the impact that the Covid - 19 pandemic will have on the finances of the sector. A potential loss in income from international students and a reduction in recruitment of home students could cause significant financial problems for many providers. It has been suggested that the financial implications are so serious that some providers could go bust or be forced to merge.

International students

Much of the focus of the financial impact has been on international students. Their fees provide a large and increasing share of total income. International students pay higher fees than home/EU students. In addition universities gain a surplus or 'profit' on teaching international students overall which helps to fund important 'loss making' activities such as research.

The coronavirus pandemic is expected to result in a drop in international students in 2020 and potentially further into the future. International student numbers have increased substantially over time. In recent years home student numbers have remained static and the only growth has been in international students

The UK HE sector had almost half a million international students in 2018/19. This was 20% of the 2.4 million students at UK universities. China is by far the largest source of international students with just over 120,000 in 2018/19. The next largest were India with just under 27,000 and the US with around 20,000.⁴¹ The table below shows that some institutions have particularly large numbers of international students.

Which Unis have the most overseas students?

Overseas students in UK universities 2018/19: Top 10

Ranked by absolute numbers		number	% of students	Ranked by % of students		% of students	number
1	University College London	19,635	48%	1	London Business School	76%	1,580
2	The University of Manchester	14,440	36%	2	Royal College of Art	71%	1,700
3	The University of Edinburgh	13,185	38%	3	LSE	68%	8,000
4	King's College London	12,385	38%	4	Imperial	53%	10,075
5	Coventry University	12,000	34%	5	London Sch. of Hygiene & Trop. Med.	52%	605
6	The University of Sheffield	10,080	33%	6	University of the Arts, London	51%	9,695
7	Imperial	10,075	53%	7	Royal College of Music	50%	415
8	University of the Arts, London	9,695	51%	8	University College London	48%	19,635
9	The University of Glasgow	9,685	31%	9	The University of St Andrews	46%	4,820
10	The University of Warwick	9,580	37%	10	Cranfield University	45%	2,025

Source: HESA, [Where do HE students come from?](#)

⁴¹ HESA, [HE student enrolments by domicile and region of HE provider 2014/15 to 2018/19](#)

There were around 116,000 overseas applicants by 15 January 2020⁴² to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK; 43,000 were from the EU and 73,000 were non-EU. China was again the most important country with 21,250 applicants. Applicant numbers from China were up by 34% compared to the 2019 cycle.⁴³

Library briefing paper [International and EU students in higher education in the UK FAQs](#), (4 March 2020) gives more details of overseas students studying in the UK.

International (non-EU) students pay higher fees than home students – sometimes two or three times what home students pay and in some universities this income generates a surplus which may be used to cross subsidise ‘loss making’ activities such as research.

In 2018/19 teaching of overseas students generated an estimated surplus of £1.7 billion⁴⁴ or 43%. This was up on 2017/18 and a greater surplus than in any other activity. Other teaching income nearly covered its costs (3.3% deficit). Research costs were £3.9 billion (44%) above income.⁴⁵

In 2018/19 fee income from non-EU students was £5.8 billion or 14.4% of the total income of all UK universities, making it more important than total income from research grants and contracts (£6.6 billion). This increases to £7.0 billion (17.3%) if income from EU students is included. Income from overseas students has increased in importance over time. It was around 4-5% of total income in the mid-1990s⁴⁶ and remained below 10% up to 2010.

It has been suggested that “universities face a black hole of hundreds of millions of pounds in tuition fees from the impact of coronavirus as international students from China and other severely affected countries are forced to cancel or postpone enrolments”.⁴⁷

An [article](#) in the *Times Higher Education* said that a drop in international students would be the “**biggest single issue**” caused by the pandemic:

A large drop in international student numbers is still likely to be the biggest single issue for UK universities irrespective of any disruption in domestic admissions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, it has been suggested.

University finance data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency show that about a quarter of institutions in the UK rely on domestic students for at least two-thirds of all their income. At the same time, only about a dozen universities receive a third or more of all their income from non-UK students.

⁴² This is the main ‘equal consideration’ deadline

⁴³ UCAS, [2020 applicant figures – 15 January deadline](#).

⁴⁴ Non-publicly funded teaching which is primarily overseas students. Data is for universities in England and Northern Ireland only

⁴⁵ Office for Students, [Annual TRAC 2018-19: Sector summary and analysis by TRAC peer group](#)

⁴⁶ Non-EU only

⁴⁷ “[UK universities face cash black hole amid coronavirus crisis](#)”, *The Guardian*, 6 March 2020

However, several studies have shown that tuition fee income from non-EU students can carry a huge surplus for universities, which then can be invested in areas such as research.⁴⁸

In 2018/19 there were more than 120,000 students from China studying in the UK as well as 17,000 from Hong Kong and Macau, and 8,000 from South Korea and Japan - a 10% fall in enrolments from those regions could cost higher education £200m or more in lost tuition fees alone.⁴⁹

3.2 May support package for universities and students

On 4 May 2020 the Government gave their response to the sector's calls for a bailout and announced a [support package for universities and students](#), the package includes: temporary student numbers controls, an additional 10,000 student places at the discretion of the Government, with 5,000 of these ring-fenced for nursing, midwifery or allied health courses, £100 million of funding brought forward for research and £2.6 billion of tuition fee payments bought forward.

This package does not include any additional funding but brings forwards some existing income streams and gives some additional flexibility to how some funding can be used. The £100 million in quality-related research funding will be brought forward to 2019/20 and paid in proportion to existing funding for this year. Second term tuition fees will be brought forward to the first term of academic 2020/21. Half of fee payments will still be made in the third term

Further details of selected elements of the package are set out below:

- **Stabilising admissions** – Temporary measures mean providers will be able to recruit full-time, domestic students up to 5% above their forecasts in the next academic year, which is in line with proposals originating from the sector, to help reduce volatility and ensure a fair and orderly admissions. The Government will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places, with 5,000 ring-fenced for nursing, midwifery or allied health courses to support the country's vital public services.
- **University research funding** – The Government is bringing forward £100m of [Quality-related research funding](#) (QR) for providers in England into this current academic year as immediate help to ensure research activities can continue during the crisis.
- **Government business support** – The Government has confirmed that universities are eligible to apply for the Government support schemes, including business loan support, which the OfS estimates could be worth at least £700m, depending upon eligibility and take-up. Providers can also access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to safeguard staff jobs, including for those with short-term contracts.

⁴⁸ "[International student hit 'core financial problem' for UK sector](#)", *Times Higher Education*, 7 April 2020

⁴⁹ "[UK universities face cash black hole amid coronavirus crisis](#)", *The Guardian*, 6 March 2020

- **Changes to tuition fee loan payments** – The Student Loans Company will bring forward tuition fee payments of students in the in the 2020/21 academic year to providers, expected to be worth £2.6bn, to help cash flow. This will not affect the loan liability, amount of interest charged to students or the timing of their maintenance loan payments.
- **Financial opportunities** – As part of existing programmes and using established procedures, the DfE will consider purchasing assets, such as land and buildings, where they can be used for new or expanding schools and colleges. This financial year the DfE has budgeted for up to £100m to acquire sites for planned projects across purchases from suitable vendors, including higher education providers among others.
- **Financial help for students** - The Government has worked with the OfS to help clarify that providers can use existing funds, totalling £46m across April and May, to boost their hardship funds for students in financial difficulty. This can include help for IT equipment and internet access.

Alongside the announcement the Student Loans Company **confirmed the process for the advanced payment** of tuition fee loans to providers:

Therefore, we are planning to make two fee payments in the first term of AY 2020/21. The first payment of 25% of the Tuition Fee Loan is being made as normal. A second payment of 25% is being made in advance of term 2. The third term payment of 50% remains unchanged.

This change applies to all UK higher education providers, in respect of English, Welsh and Northern Irish full-time and part-time undergraduate students.⁵⁰

3.3 June support package for research

On 27 June the Government announced a [support package for university research](#). This had two elements:

- around £280 million government funding will be made available to universities impacted by coronavirus. This will fund extensions to grants, allowing them to continue developing ambitious and innovative research projects, funded through UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) and the National Academies, including supporting researchers' salaries and other research costs like laboratory equipment and fieldwork.
- from this autumn, UK universities will be able to access a series of government grants and long-term, low interest loans covering up to 80% of their income losses caused by an expected decline in international students, ensuring that their crucial research can continue

[Explanatory notes](#) published alongside the announcement gave more detail.

The grant extensions will be paid to organisations with UKRI grants that are expected to end in financial year 2020/21. Funding will be paid to organisations pro rata to the value of the original grants.

⁵⁰ Student Loans Company, [FAQ – Reprofiled termly fee payments](#), 4 May 2020

On the second element the notes say:

Secondly, from the Autumn, government will demonstrate its commitment to research by providing a package of support to research-active universities, consisting of low-interest loans with long pay-back periods, supplemented by a small amount of government grants. In sharing responsibility for the future of science and research with our world-leading university system the government will cover up to 80% of a university's income losses from international students for the academic year 20/21, up to the value of non-publicly funded research activity in that university.

We expect the level of support being provided to go a significant way to addressing reductions in research income. This second part of this package will be targeted towards sustaining research and innovation activity and capacity in universities across the UK so universities will need to demonstrate that funding is being spent on research activity and on sustaining high quality research capacity and capability including, a particular emphasis on STEM research and areas of research typically funded by charities and businesses. This funding will be available to bolster those universities who are taking their own steps to make efficiencies, in line with the rest of the economy, to protect their research bases.

At least 75% of the support will be in loans. Non-publicly funded research is that funded by businesses and charities and from a university's own income. It will not cover losses from EU Research and Innovation programmes. Losses from any decline in international students will be calculated by comparing numbers in 2020/21 with 2018/19. The Government said:

The international student metric when combined with the measure of 'non-publicly funded research' is a good proxy for overall Covid-19 losses to research revenue. In return for support, Government will be asking for universities to demonstrate how funds are being utilised to sustain research in areas typically funded by charities and business.

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