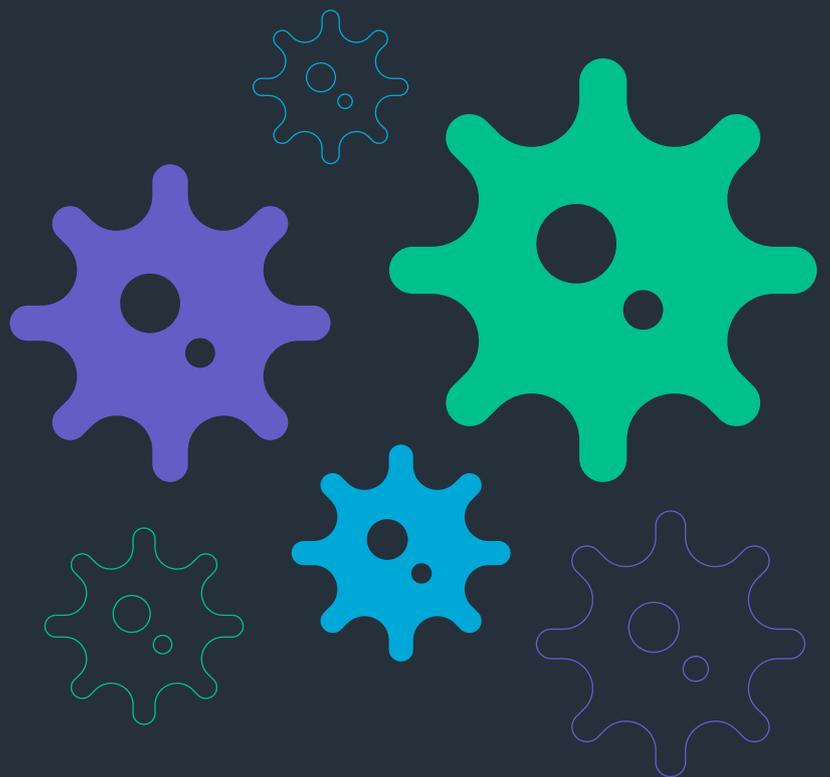


Coronavirus  
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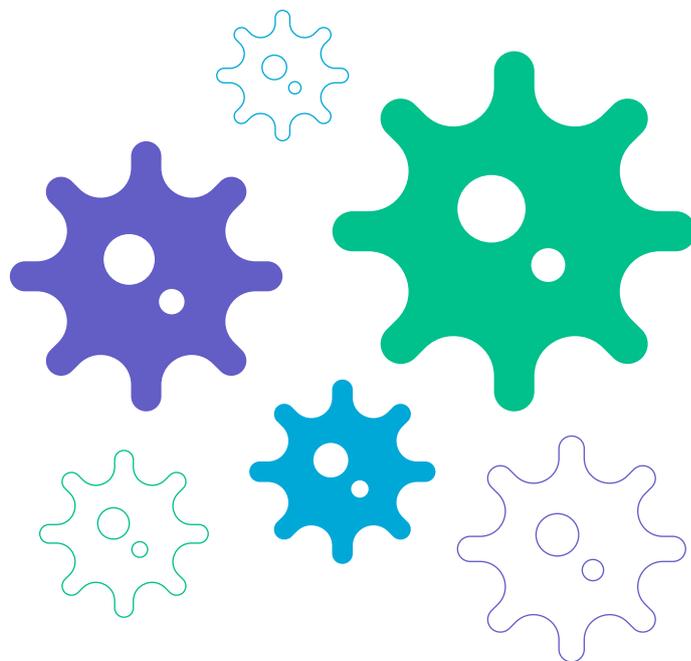


# NEU Education Recovery Plan

January 2021



# Foreword



The National Education Union (NEU) education recovery plan sets out how to reopen schools and colleges in a safe and sustainable way.

The plan outlines the challenges that our education system must overcome if pupils are to recover their confidence, interest and joy in learning and to make the progress they are capable of.

The last section of the plan looks beyond schools and colleges to wider societal issues, in particular the huge and lasting damage that child poverty wreaks upon our already most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, and proposes concrete measures to tackle it.

Our plan provides a route towards sustainable school and college opening and away from the Government's stop/start approach, which has resulted in schools and colleges being closed to full pupil intakes twice.

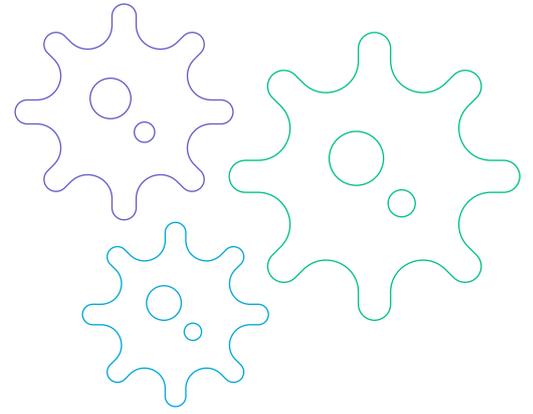
The plan is rooted in the union's detailed knowledge, drawn from our members' professional experience and expertise, and our close attention to the science around Covid-19, to state clearly what preparations and precautions are needed for schools and colleges to open, and be given the best chance to remain open. Our children and young people, and their parents, deserve no less.

This plan was written in advance of the Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons on 27 January – where he outlined a possible commencement of a return to school on 8 March.

**The NEU will work hard to get the Government to accept the proposals in this plan so that our members can return to school, when the science says it is safe to do so, with confidence that their health and the education of their pupils, will be properly protected.**



# NEU Education Recovery Plan – January 2021



The Covid-19 pandemic has been hugely disruptive to education. It has twice necessitated the closure of schools and colleges – except to vulnerable students and children of key workers – from March to July, 2020 and from 4 January, 2021.

The Government must act urgently to create the conditions to sustain education throughout and beyond the pandemic. Declaring schools and colleges Covid-secure does not make them so.

Ministers must act, now, to create Covid-secure conditions in all schools and colleges to keep those who work and learn within them safe and to stop education workplaces being, in the words of the Prime Minister, “vectors of transmission causing the virus to spread between households”.

Government has not, up to this point, made schools and colleges Covid-secure. Ministers have consistently set their sights on returning all students to full-time education rather than planning to return them safely.

Government errors were identified early by the National Education Union (NEU). School and college staff are working in education buildings without adequate cleaning and social distancing – with whole year group ‘bubbles’ in secondary schools, inadequate PPE and poor ventilation.

The preparations we make now for wider reopening of schools and colleges must accept that a full return by all students may not be possible for some time; and that safe education requires a commitment to safety when in school and to continuing remote education where necessary.

Covid-19 has exposed the endemic levels of poverty and inequality in the UK. Child poverty is on the rise, with all the consequences that brings children and young people in health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes. The causes of poverty must be tackled and so must the causes of racism. It is not acceptable that in 2021, 46% of Black children are growing up trapped in poverty.

Our education recovery plan is split into three parts. The first focuses on the challenge of educating students safely, by creating safer educational workplaces and continuing remote learning where necessary.

The second part of the plan contains proposals to build a better education system as we emerge from the pandemic.

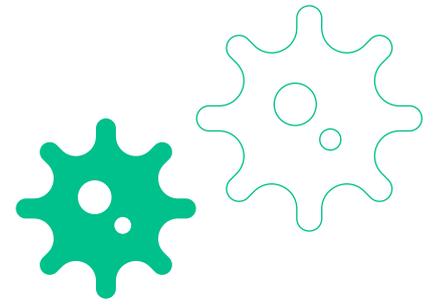
The third section of the plan is a call to fight child poverty and to build a better world, post-Covid, for all our children and young people.

The NEU wrote to Boris Johnson on 10 June with its [first education recovery plan](#). We did not receive a reply. We offer this updated plan to the Prime Minister in the spirit in which the first was intended – to secure a safe and uninterrupted return to education for all.



# Part 1

## Safety in our schools and colleges



### 1. Social distancing in schools and colleges

**Social distancing and limitations on social mixing are required for Covid-19 security in schools and colleges. This is even more essential than before because of the increased transmissibility of the new Covid-19 variants.**

**Rationale:** From September to December 2020, Covid-19 infection rates rose amongst secondary and primary age groups alike so that, by Christmas, secondary students were the most infected age group and primary, the second.

Levels of infection for secondary students multiplied by 75 times throughout the autumn term. (1) Whole year group bubbles allowed Covid-19 to spread amongst pupils. Social distancing is essential in order to reduce the spread of Covid-19 amongst students, and from them to their families and into their communities.

The third most highly infected age group, by the end of the autumn term, were adults of parental age who are scheduled for later vaccination – so the importance of suppressing infection in schools remains paramount.

While schools and colleges remain open only to some students, further steps must be taken to limit the numbers that are still attending, through reviewing the categories allowed to attend and permitting leaders to limit numbers further where necessary.

Limits on bubble size and mixing and crossing bubbles must not be relaxed. When more students return, arrangements

for distancing, bubbles and constraints on mixing must be maintained.

(1) [Coronavirus Infection Survey](#)

### 2. Limit numbers on site through rotas and remote education.

**Rationale:** The UK has some of the most crowded school and college buildings in the OECD. The average secondary school has a 97% occupancy rate. If social distancing in education buildings is to become a reality, then fewer students must be on site. Rotas are a good means of allowing regular attendance for in-person teaching in schools and colleges whilst reducing overcrowding and enabling social distancing. Special schools and colleges are already operating rota systems and must be encouraged to share good practice and what works for pupils and staff when operating them.

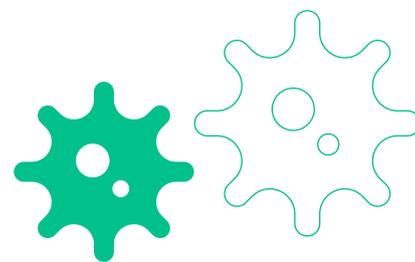
It will be necessary to employ more staff for rotas to work effectively both to lower numbers of pupils in classrooms and maintain high quality remote education. Schools and colleges should be given increased funding to employ supply staff, newly-qualified teachers without posts and support staff to meet the greatly increased workload involved in teaching some students in school and others remotely.

Other approaches which should be adopted include erecting marquees on school sites and identifying and bringing back into use unused public buildings, which could permit primary schools in particular to reduce group sizes without implementing rotas.



## Part 1

### Safety in our schools and colleges



#### 3. Increase the use of face coverings and better ventilation.

**Rationale:** The risk of infection is greatest indoors, in crowded spaces – a description which sums up the situation in most schools and colleges.

Mask wearing suppresses viral transmission. Secondary-aged students, in particular, are known to be able to transmit the virus to each other and into their households. (1) They are also old enough to understand the importance of mask wearing and able to learn and practise good habits in mask wearing.

Masks should be worn by secondary-aged students in classrooms as well as all other areas of the school. They should be worn at all times by all staff in all schools and colleges. Classrooms must also be well ventilated, while maintaining a reasonable temperature; costs for additional heating must be reimbursed.

(1) Children’s Task and Finish Group: [update to 4 Nov 2020 paper on children, schools and transmission, page 9](#)

#### 4. Education staff should be vaccinated as a priority.

**Rationale:** Whilst vaccination will not stop the highest level of Covid-19 transmission into the community – from pupils to their families – it will provide greatly increased levels of safety for school and college staff, who have no choice other than to work in close proximity with primary and secondary pupils who are the most infected age groups. Staff in special schools and early years are at increased risk because of the need for close physical contact and the difficulty in keeping these pupils socially distanced. Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), and clinically vulnerable education

staff, should be allowed to work from home supporting children’s remote education until they are vaccinated.

#### 5. Specific support for SEND settings.

**Rationale:** Since March 2020, the NEU has been urging the DfE to recognise the unique issues faced by special schools and alternative provision in planning for the Covid-safety of staff and pupils.

Special schools and alternative provision need:

- ▶ smaller class sizes.
- ▶ rotas for staff and pupils.
- ▶ CEV staff and pupils working remotely.
- ▶ mask wearing allowed where the school deems appropriate.
- ▶ medical grade PPE provided to carry out personal care and Aerosol Generated Procedures (AGPs).

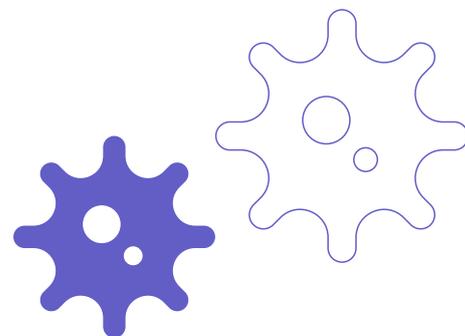
There are other specific needs for pupils with SEND, including:

- ▶ funding for adaptive technology for remote learning.
- ▶ specialist tutors and additional qualified specialist staff to address learning gaps and social and emotional development needs.
- ▶ access to services such as CAMHS and occupational health for parents and carers, with planning for additional services afterwards to meet increased demand.



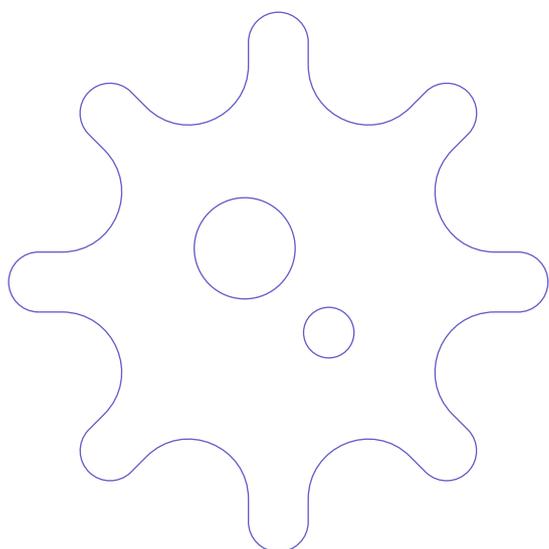
# Part 2

## Let's build a better education system



This pandemic has highlighted many flaws in our education system and we must address them. As more pupils return to schools, we must not rush headlong into a route march back to the past but take this opportunity to question those aspects which are not working, and to reflect on practices which school staff and pupils have learnt to do differently.

Until the population is vaccinated, and infection rates are manageable, there is likely to be continuing disruption to schools. A recovery plan is needed that focuses on what's most important for pupils over the next year. Schools must be encouraged to support students to learn what they need for their next stages of education, rather than to simply pass tests. And pupils will also need to more opportunities to revisit learning content that has been previously covered.



### 1. A well thought out reintegration plan, with flexibility for schools to meet the needs of their communities.

**Rationale:** School leaders know the needs of their communities and their pupils and should be supported in their plans for gradual return. Government could provide models, and support leaders to share practice. Plans should also be made to support blended learning, where pupils access both remote and in-person teaching.

Ofsted should not return to a full inspection programme while schools are working to reintegrate pupils, assess their continuing needs and understand what they have learnt during lockdown. Instead, Ofsted should focus on thematic reports which support school and college staff in understanding the most effective approaches to reintegrating children and young people to learning in school, the learning loss experienced by pupils and the most effective ways of tackling this.

### 2. Employ supply teachers and qualified teachers who have left the profession to work in schools and colleges.

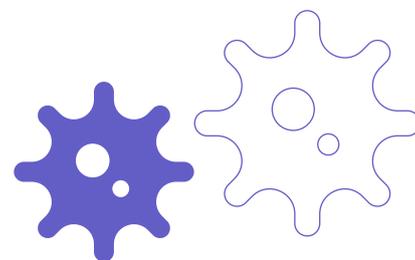
**Rationale:** Pupils returning to school will have experienced very different home learning environments. The attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children – already too wide – will have grown.

The NEU does not have confidence in the Government's 'catch up' scheme, which is too complicated for schools to use



## Part 2

### Let's build a better education system



effectively, relies too heavily on private providers of tuition whose quality is not assured and is insufficiently controlled by school leaders. It will be much better, and more effective, if schools are given increased staffing budgets to employ additional qualified teaching staff to support individualised and small group tuition for pupils who need it when they return to school and college.

Trainees and newly qualified teachers have also suffered during the periods of lockdown, without sufficient time in classrooms or with colleagues to complete their training satisfactorily. Government should plan additional support, through the Early Career Framework, to ensure both that these teachers meet the standards and that they are motivated to stay in the profession.

#### **3. Develop and properly resource a recovery curriculum to run over a number of years.**

**Rationale:** Children and young people will have suffered huge disruption over two years, including learning at home for at least two terms. Pupils will need to be taught what they need for their next stages of education, rather than to simply pass tests. Schools are best placed to know what their pupils need and Government should develop a transition phase, over at least the next year, with flexibility to disapply the national curriculum as necessary in order to provide the depth and breadth of teaching and other support which pupils require.

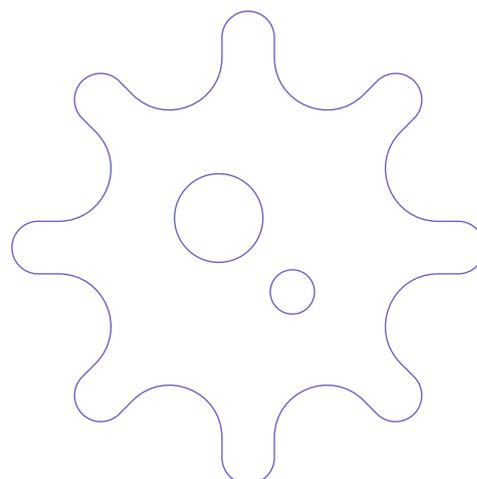
While Government and Ofqual are now working on plans for exams for this year's cohort, it is too little too late. We must not be in this position next year and Government should be planning now for those who are sitting exams and vocational qualifications in 2021/2. This should be a well-planned

combination of exams and moderated centre assessment, with time given to develop moderation and to offer training to teachers.

#### **4. Plans must be made for those who are in transition years.**

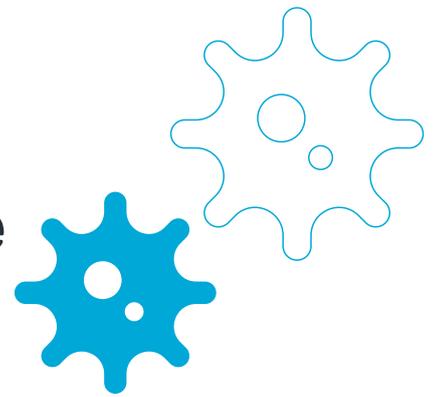
**Rationale:** Government must provide support for pupils currently in Year 6 so that their transition to secondary can operate more smoothly than the previous year. Students in year 7 currently will have experienced a disrupted transition between primary and secondary schools, which will have impacted on their learning and their relationships with peers and teachers.

Children in the early years, and those about to start school, will have missed out on many formative experiences of social interaction with peers and unfamiliar adults. Nursery and reception classes will need to be well resourced for social, physical, and academic support. A formal baseline assessment in September 2021 will be unhelpful in these circumstances as it will focus attention on what children can't do rather than allowing teachers to understand what they can do.



## Part 3

# Work as a nation to give all children and young people the best start in life



Covid-19 has exposed brutal poverty and inequality in the UK and the harm this does to children and young people. Too many suffer from food insecurity, poor housing, tech poverty, stigmatisation and social exclusion, which combine to create a toxic combination of anxiety about the present, a lack of belief in the future and increasing rates of mental ill-health for children and young people.

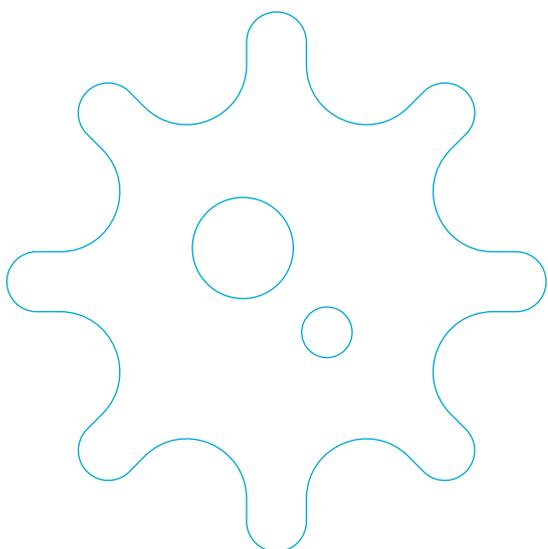
As a nation, we should be ashamed that we treat our most precious resource – our children – in this way. We need a new spirit abroad in the nation and a new determination, as was expressed in the 1942 Beveridge report, to transform the conditions in which poor children and their families live so that all children and young people, whatever their background, are given the best start in life.

### 1. End child poverty.

**Rationale:** Covid-19 has exposed the brutal effects of child poverty in the UK. 2.3 million children are now living with food insecurity. (1) Over 80% of families with children at food banks were classed as severely food insecure, meaning that they had skipped meals and gone without eating, sometimes for days at a time because of a lack of money. (2)

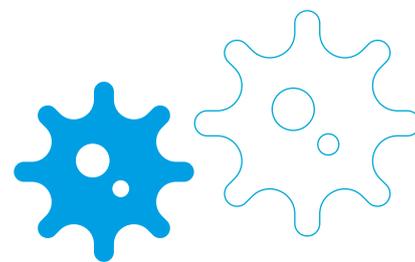
It should be understood by everyone that children cannot learn if they are hungry and are hugely stressed if they do not know whether they will be hungry soon. Nine pupils in an average class of 30 are poor. (3) Their lives are blighted by inequality and insecurity. 40% of the attainment gap between poor children and their more advantaged classmates is set in stone before they start school, (4) leaving education professionals with a mountain to climb in their unending efforts to remedy the corrosive effects of poverty and inequality on children and young people's futures. Government must reverse the increase in child poverty and ensure that all children and their families can live their lives with dignity and security and that they will have the essentials that enable them to take their part as active citizens in our society.

- (1) New Food Foundation Data, September 2020.
- (2) The Trussell trust and Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI), March 2018.
- (3) Child Poverty Action Group Facts and Figures, July 2020.
- (4) Grammar Schools and Social Mobility - Education Policy Institute, 2016.



## Part 3

### Work as a nation to give all children and young people the best start in life



#### 2. All pupils must be guaranteed access to broadband and laptops, which will enable them to learn remotely, and to study and develop their skills once schools are fully open.

**Rationale:** Ofcom estimates that between 1.14m and 1.78m children in the UK have no home access to a laptop, desktop computer or tablet. The Government's scheme to provide these have so far failed to reach one million children who need one.

Whilst online learning is not the only strategy used by teachers to educate their pupils remotely, it is an important element of that provision. It is unacceptable that so many children and young people do not have access to the internet or laptops when they are so essential for studying, information finding and development of their I.T. skills and confidence – all vital to their future employment.

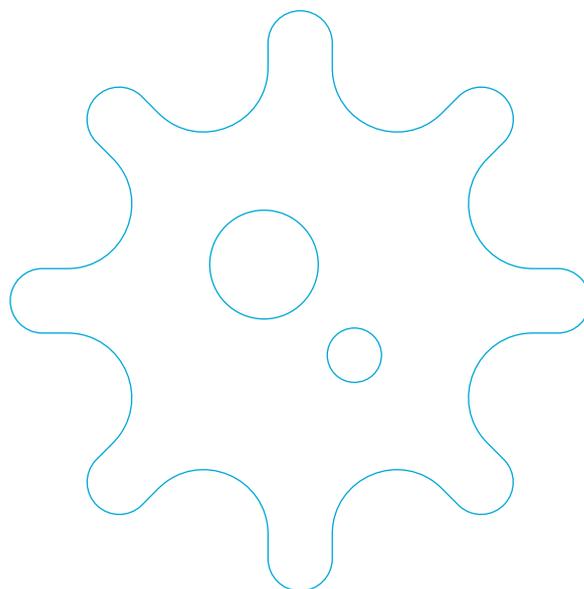
#### 3. A fully-resourced national plan for children's wellbeing should be launched to support those who suffered trauma in the pandemic.

**Rationale:** Students' wellbeing must be placed at the centre of how we adapt education to meet the needs of children and young people. Too many children and young people's mental health has suffered during the pandemic. They must be supported to recover and regain their wellbeing and confidence in themselves and their future.

#### 4. Welfare reform is needed so that parents are not working for their family's poverty.

**Rationale:** The majority of poor children live in families where at least one parent is working. Job insecurity and low rates of pay leave too many parents working for their poverty. Work must be paid a living wage. Universal credit must be reformed to end the five-week waiting time for payment, end the two-child limit and the current emergency uprate of £20 must be continued for the foreseeable future.

Free School meal (FSM) provision should be expanded to all families in receipt of Universal Credit and children should be able to access FSM during school holidays. The costs to parents for schooling must be kept to a minimum – the Government must ensure an upper cap to the costs of school uniforms.



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January 2021**

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