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COVID-19 dominates everything

The coronavirus COVID-19 sweeps the world as this issue of *Literacy Today* is published. From today all schools will be closed, except for limited provision for the children of key workers and those deemed to be vulnerable. This follows a change of policy last week when the British government reacted to modelling from Imperial College, London, which predicted that deaths from the virus would reach 550,000 if policy remained unchanged.

This came as a shock to ministers who thought that they had been following the scientific evidence. They had, but scientists differed over what should be done and those recommending a more relaxed response and hoping for herd immunity to develop as a natural counter to the illness proved wrong in their estimates of the cost in terms of human lives lost.

The result is that, with little notice, most parents will now have to home school their children until September. That will present many challenges, not least for those of primary age children who, as social media posts show, have no idea what synthetic phonics is. The system that all primary schools are being forced to adopt is a mystery to earlier generations who were at school when teachers were free to use whatever they thought would work best for their pupils and therefore used a variety of techniques. As for the false words of the Phonics Screening Check, few parents will have any idea what that is about.

Schools and colleges are trying to put materials on-line, as are training providers running ESOL courses. The BBC is also throwing together materials for parents and students to use, with soaps and even some news programmes scaled back to free up resources to make educational programmes to help parents and students cope with the new learning environment.

Teachers will also be working remotely to support students. Ironically, the second volume of the OECD's TALIS research programme on teachers is published tomorrow. It will show that while 90% of teachers are, on average, satisfied with their job, only 26% think that society values their work. With teachers working more closely with parents and students at home, that figure is likely to rise over the coming months. (A full report on TALIS will be in tomorrow's issue of *Education Journal*.)

Some governments around the world have introduced draconian measures that will last initially for two weeks. In reality the COVID-19 pandemic will last three to four months in its most virulent form and up to a couple of years as a major world health issue, which is how long it may take to develop a vaccine and make it available to everyone. This pandemic is the biggest world health threat since the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-20.

Contents

IELTS
News.
Page 2

ESOL
News.
Page 2

Literacy Works Week
News.
Page 3

Adults
News.
Page 3

Quick Reads
News.
Page 3

SATS replacement
News.
Page 4

Early years
News.
Page 5

Literary poverty
News.
Page 6

Who controls ITT?
Research.
Pages 9 to 13

Reading emotions
Research.
Pages 14 to 16

Baseline assessment
Research.
Page 17

Libraries
Parliament.
Page 25

New preparation website launched for IELTS learners

Cambridge University Press and Cambridge Assessment English have launched a new website to provide International English Language Testing System takers with all they need for IELTS success. “We Love IELTS” includes a blog, practice activities, videos, and other resources, designed to help self-study learners prepare for their test. A highlight of the website is the Resource Finder which recommends preparation materials based on answers to five quick questions.

Cambridge University Press and Cambridge Assessment English worked together to provide official preparation materials for Cambridge English Qualifications and IELTS, managed by a joint team Cambridge Exams Publishing.

Pamela Baxter, CEO at Cambridge Exams Publishing, said that We Love IELTS offered support for learners, as well as information on the range of Official Cambridge IELTS preparation materials. She pointed out that it also provided a wealth of content from authors, teachers and successful test takers. Ms Baxter said that the aim was to help students get the most out of their study time, stay motivated and ultimately feel confident on test day. She added that alongside the website, there were also three new social channels where learners could find more resources and a supportive community.

Thousands to benefit from new English language classes

A £6.5 million English language programme will aim to help local authorities to meet the English language needs of their communities. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Robert Jenrick, MP, said that the aim of the programme was to help people fulfil their potential and increase integration in their local area.

The English for Speakers of Other Languages for Integration Fund will fund classes for up to 25 local authorities. Mr Jenrick said that the new programme would deliver high-quality language teaching in familiar and accessible community locations including schools, registered childcare settings and places of worship. He added that it had also been designed to improve people’s connection to their local area and encourage social relationships between different communities. The minister stressed that a lack of English skills presented a barrier to social and economic mobility and for some learners, more formal approaches to learning English could be challenging. He pointed out that the most common difficulties were travel costs, lack of childcare, illiteracy in their first language or a reluctance or lack of confidence to make the first steps towards learning English.

Robert Jenrick said that learning English was essential to life and work in Britain and people saw huge benefits, once they could speak the language fluently. He explained that the Government was making it a requirement to learn

English in the new British immigration system, and funding for existing citizens who speak little or no English, will be provided to help them learn English quickly.

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Read and write with Literacy Works Week

Unionlearn geared up for the fourth Literacy Works Week, from 9th to 13th March, when it celebrated all things to do with reading, writing and language. The week was packed full of ideas, quizzes and case studies, including the launch of Grammar Matters, a SkillCheck quiz on basic grammar rules and the promotion of the recently launched batch of new Quick Reads.

Following @unionlearn in Twitter enabled people to test their brain with daily literacy quiz questions during the week. Individuals and groups were invited to join in and tweet about their literacy activities using #literacyworks hashtag. The daily blogs on the unionlearn website aimed to encourage people to write a blog themselves.

The eNotes, short online learning modules, provided by TU Education will aim to update writing skills, and Read Now! offered new reading techniques and Language support for workers to set up ESOL support in the workplace.

£1.5 billion funding boost needed to reverse record low number of adult learners

To boost support for disadvantaged adults, the LGA is urging the Government to at least double the Adult Education Budget, some of which funds local authority adult and community education provision, from £1.5 billion to £3 billion. Councils had warned that thousands of disadvantaged adults were being held back from vital support to help them get on in life because funding for adult learning had fallen by almost half over the last decade.

The Local Government Association stressed its concern that reductions in adult education funding had coincided with a drop of 3.8 million adult learners since 2010, which had left just 33 per cent of adults on courses or in training, a record low since figures began in 1996. Despite needing it the most, adults with the lowest qualifications were the least likely to access adult training.

The LGA said that increasing adult education funding and devolving it to councils and combined authorities would enable them to deliver much-needed skills provision to help adults that needed support the most would get the skills they needed to progress in life, either by acting as stepping stones to further education or employment, or by giving them the skills to lead more independent and healthier lives, in a way that could not be achieved by the centralised employment and skills system that was run from Whitehall.

Making the best out of Quick Reads

Unionlearn has published a guide to help union learning reps to make the best use of Quick Reads. *Ready to Read*, promotes the use of Quick Reads in the workplace and offers hints and tips on how to make reading a pleasure. The new guide explores the benefits of reading and suggests how reps can engage their colleagues in reading and sharing their enjoyment of books. It also suggests resources to help setting up reading groups.

The publication of Ready to Read coincided with the publication of a new batch of Quick Reads. Unionlearn director, Kevin Rowan, said that union learning projects were exceptional in their ability to engage adults to update their literacy skills and Quick Reads had been a very helpful way to get people interested in reading.

Key stage 1 SATs replacement to begin in September

From September, all new primary school pupils will take the new reception baseline assessment that will replace SATs in year 2. The Department for Education said that a one-to-one exercise, which would take 20 minutes to complete with a teacher in an informal setting, would be taken by all children in their first six weeks of primary school. The DfE said that the move would pave the way for the removal of the national curriculum assessments at the end of key stage 1 from 2022/23, commonly known as SATs, when pupils were aged six- or seven-years-old.

The School Standards Minister, Nick Gibb, said that a validity report based on a national pilot had confirmed that the new assessments would provide an accurate assessment of a pupils' starting point from which to measure the progress they made in primary school. He added that the new teacher-led check would replace the SATs taken at the end of year 2 to give a better understanding of a child's starting point when they arrived at school and reduce the number of assessments in primary schools overall.

Mr Gibb said that a new report that had analysed the effectiveness of the RBA had found that:

- The assessment has been representative of a range of literacy, communication, language and mathematics skills and knowledge appropriate to the age and development of children at the start of reception.
- Assessment results had provided a fair and accurate measure of pupil performance. including for those with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Pupil performance had been comparable within and across schools.
- The pilot had showed that over 90% of assessments would be completed within 20 minutes

NAHT General Secretary, Paul Whiteman said that the introduction of a reliable and workable baseline assessment to replace year 2 SATs had the potential to be a fairer way of measuring progress and it meant that there would be a reduction in the volume of high stakes testing in primary schools. He pointed out that the reception baseline assessment had been designed to reflect the types of assessment that most schools already carried out in reception. Mr Whiteman added that the assessment would take roughly 20 minutes, it would be carried out one-to-one with pupils, and it did not have a pass mark. He explained that children will be assessed orally through simple, practical tasks which could include counting or describing pictures and teachers and parents would not need to prepare pupils for the assessment.

Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said that the announcement that Reception Baseline Assessment would be made compulsory in September was predictable, but not welcome. She pointed out that the DfE had satisfied itself about the technical validity of the tests, but she argued that it was completely incurious about the effects of Baseline Assessment on the educational experience of four-year-olds. Dr Bousted added that the DfE had also failed to offer any assessment of the workload impact on teachers of carrying out a test that would have no useful outcomes for pupils' immediate learning, which would mean that they would need to carry out their own expert assessments.

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Early years apps to help families learn at home

Parents are to benefit from new technology to support their children’s learning at home following the launch of six apps to improve reading, writing and speaking. Following a competition to find the best educational apps for parents to engage young children in learning at home, a panel of experts appointed by the Government approved six apps that focused on early literacy, language and communication.

The apps cover activities ranging from interactive story books, handwriting exercises using Artificial Intelligence, and educational video games. Published on the Hungry Little Minds website, the apps are part of the Government’s drive to help parents make informed decisions about the use of technology in creating positive learning environments at home. The expert panel which accredited the apps was chaired by Professor Jackie Marsh of the University of Sheffield and appointed by the Department for Education. It included children’s digital media consultants, early learning charities and researchers at universities. The Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, said that while the majority of families were already using technology for fun and to support their child’s early education, it could be difficult for busy parents to work out what content would be the best. He added that the list of expert-approved apps would help parents to decide which ones would benefit their child’s language and literacy skills.

The six apps published on the Hungry Little Minds website include:

- **Lingumi** (For children aged 2-5): Sets of learning games, speech recognition games and video-based games to help with a child’s grammar and helping them in speaking their first words early on.
- **Kaligo** (For children aged 3-5): The first digital handwriting exercise book using a stylus and tablet, built using AI and co-created with teachers, occupational therapists and neuroscientists.
- **Phonics Hero** (For school-aged children): Over 850 varied and motivating games to take a child step-by-step through the 44 sounds, the reading and spelling of words, and how to conquer sentences.
- **Teach Your Monster to Read** (For school-aged children): Covers the first two years of learning to read, from matching letters and sounds to enjoying little books, designed in collaboration with leading academics.
- **Navigo Game** (For school-aged children): Focuses on developing skills that underpin reading, including phonics, letters and sounds, designed by UCL Institute of Education and Fish in a Bottle.
- **Fonetti** (For school-aged children): The world’s first “Listening Bookshop” which interacts with children by giving visual cues in real-time as they read aloud and highlights where the support is needed.

To accompany the launch of the apps, the Department for Education published research which showed that early education at the age of two for disadvantaged children had been found to have a positive impact on their speaking ability. Over half of parents surveyed (52%) said that they played pretend games together or took turns playing with their child every day.

The DfE said that the data had highlighted the need to tackle the barriers that some parents faced in supporting their child’s learning at home, including time, confidence and ideas of things to do.

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Businesses pledge to improve local literacy levels

Seventy-nine leading businesses have committed to taking action in their local communities to address low literacy levels. This is the fifth year of a cross-sector initiative to encourage business support for driving up literacy levels in the UK. Developed by the National Literacy Forum (19 literacy and child poverty charities) and sponsored by KPMG, the Pledge provides a framework for business action on literacy.

Since 2016 there has been an 80% increase in the number of businesses signing up. Amongst new signatories this year are; The Estée Lauder Companies UK & Ireland, Twinkl, Bloomsbury and Bonnier. The National Literacy Trust will help businesses to identify and address the literacy challenges in their local communities. Businesses will also be supported to engage their employees in the literacy challenge and contribute to the national campaign to raise literacy levels.

- For more information about the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge, email BusinessPledge@literacytrust.co.uk.

Over a quarter of a million school children experiencing literary poverty

Research has revealed that more than a quarter of a million UK primary school children are experiencing literary poverty. Literary poverty has been defined by BookTrust, the UK's children's reading charity, as a child who is read to for pleasure, for less than 15 minutes a week outside school.

The study revealed that 345,0001 (14%) school children aged seven to nine were currently falling into the category, and a further 17% were on the border, as they were read to for less than half an hour a week. Six per cent of children aged 7-9 fell into the worse category of literary poverty, as their parents or guardians did not read to them at all.

Just a third (37%) of young children in the UK were reading with or being read to by a parent or carer for over an hour a week in total. BookTrust is encouraging families to read together for just 10 minutes a day to help to develop language, curiosity, imagination and listening skills.

The charity warned that the traditional bedtime story was also suffering, as one in seven parents admitted that they never read to their child before bed. A further 11% said that they only did so once a week on average. But the research showed that the importance of regular reading was not lost on parents, as nine in ten agreed that reading for pleasure was important for their child.

Children aged 7 – 11 are on average reading for pleasure for 28 minutes less a week than their parents had at the same age, as half of children aged 7 - 11 in the UK (50%) read for less than an hour a week.

Commenting as the BookTrust release data which showed that thousands of children were reading at home for less than 15 minutes a week, Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said that parents should try to set aside time for reading with their children as often as possible. He added that reading together was a wonderful way for families and children to spend quality time together and it could help to foster a love of reading that could last a lifetime.

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Children's booklist to support children's mental health and wellbeing

To coincide with Children's Mental Health Week, UK charity, The Reading Agency and Libraries Connected, launched a children's mental health scheme as part of their Reading Well programme. The Reading Well for children booklist contains 33 books that cover topics such as grief, anxiety, bullying and staying safe online.

In recognition of the potential impact of living with diagnosed conditions and physical disabilities, the booklist explores living well with conditions including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, dyslexia, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and physical disabilities.

The booklist is targeted at children in Key Stage 2 and it includes titles that are suitable for a wide range of reading levels to support less confident readers, and to encourage children to read together with their siblings and carers. Created in partnership with Libraries Connected, the booklist is free to access from public libraries.

Coram Beanstalk launches new Creating Readers workshops

Coram Beanstalk has launched a series of new workshops aimed at guiding parents, grandparents and those who regularly look after pre-school and primary school aged children to get the best out of sharing books together and to build the foundations of a lifelong love of reading. For the first time in its 45 years' of experience in training volunteers to help children aged 3-13 in pre-schools and primary schools to improve their reading ability and enjoyment, the charity has adapted aspects of its reading helper training to create three short workshops to focus on equipping other individuals, such as parents, grandparents, foster carers and childminders.

The three new Creating Readers workshops, which each last two hours, have been developed to suit different age groups (ages 3-5, 6-8 and 9-11). They are all based on encouraging children with their reading and the workshops will be available in locations across the UK.

Sharing with an adult

Ginny Lunn, Managing Director at Coram Beanstalk, said that while children learned the mechanics of reading at school, it was also important for children to have regular opportunities to share a book with an adult in the home environment away from the pressures of having to decode.

The workshops. Which are being launched in cities across the UK, cost £50 per person, which will include a two-hour workshop with a Coram Beanstalk trainer and post-workshop materials. A logo will be available for those working in a professional environment with children, such as child minders, to certify that they had attended a Creating Readers course delivered by Coram Beanstalk.

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Embedding English in apprenticeships

The Further Education and Training sector's workforce development body, the Education and Training Foundation, has launched a CPD programme to support the embedding of maths and English into apprenticeships delivery. The Embedding maths and English in apprenticeships programme is available online and the programme is free of charge during the pilot which will end on 31 March 2020.

Apprentices undertaking a Level 3 or higher apprenticeship are required to hold or achieve a Level 2 in maths and English before they can successfully complete their apprenticeship. In addition, apprentices undertaking a Level 2 apprenticeship must work towards Level 2 in maths and English.

The ETF's online learning packages have been designed to give those responsible for apprenticeship maths and English delivery practical strategies and resources to improve learner outcomes. The programme offers support in motivating and engaging apprentices by relating maths and English to workplace practices relevant to their interests. The new CPD aims to aid the employment of apprentices through improving employer support and collaboration in the development of apprentices' maths and English skills in the workplace.

The professional development programme consists of four learning packages. Each includes one online module and a follow-up interactive webinar which will build on the module's content:

- Embedding strategies: how to work towards an embedded approach to the delivery of maths and English in apprenticeships.
- Resources: how to find and use appropriate resources for an embedded approach, including resources to upskill staff involved in apprenticeship delivery.
- Assessment: how to identify appropriate assessment methods for effective embedding.
- Inclusivity: how to support inclusivity for the effective delivery of maths and English in apprenticeships.

Users will be able to pick and choose from the four learning packages based on their training needs. The training is aimed at workplace supervisors, specialist English teachers, vocational trainers learning mentors and assessors who are responsible for on and off-the-job training of apprentices and employers.

World Book Night will go digital for 2020

World Book Night, the annual celebration of reading on 23 April, aims to inspire everyone to share books and reading, whether they are less confident or passionate readers. The initiative is a key part of The Reading Agency's "mission" to support everyone in reading their way to a better life, using the proven power of reading to promote skills and learning, health and wellbeing and build social connections.

This year will see an expansion of World Book Night's digital offer as The Reading Agency seeks to make reading available to the widest possible audience. This year's titles, from publishers including Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster and Andersen Press, include a diverse selection of books for adults and young people. The 2020 list features both paperbacks and audiobooks, including *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, *Double Crossed* by Brian Wood and *Bedtime Stories for Stressed Out Adults* edited by Lucy Mangan available for individuals to receive via a download code. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams (which is celebrating a significant 42nd birthday in 2020) will be donated as both a paperback to organisations and an audiobook to individuals.

Other titles on the list include *Death on the Nile* by Agatha Christie (coinciding with the 100th anniversary of Agatha Christie's first novel), *How to Be a Footballer* by Peter Crouch, and *Diversify* by June Sarpong. The full can be viewed on the World Book Night website. Copies of the books will be donated by publishers to organisations across the UK. Applications for the giveaway are now open at worldbooknight.org/apply. Celebratory events will take place across the country in April 2020. The Reading Agency will work with public libraries, prisons, colleges, care homes, youth centres, mental health groups, charities and other organisations to "spread the joy of reading".

The future of early reading courses in initial teacher education institutions in England: Who controls the content?

By Margaret M. Clark OBE

The education policy discussed here is mandatory only in England, not the United Kingdom, as education is a devolved power. The Department for Education and Ofsted are responsible only for schools in England. Since 2010 there have been five Secretaries of State for Education. However, Nick Gibb, has recently been reappointed Minister of State for School Standards. He has over many years promoted the government systematic synthetic phonics policy, for which he has been complimented publicly in parliament by both the Chairman of the Education Select Committee and the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. Nick Gibb has claimed the success of this policy in debates, in written answers to MPs' questions, in articles and at conferences around the world (including in Australia). It is for this reason that quotations I have selected are from him, not the Secretaries of State.

There has been a growing insistence by the government since 2012 that in the teaching of early reading in primary schools in England there should be a focus on phonics, not just as one of a range of strategies, but that synthetic phonics should be adopted as the only way to teach all children to read. This policy is claimed to be based on research evidence that synthetic phonics only is the best way to teach all children to read. None of the research that challenges the government statements and those of Ofsted is cited in government policy documents (Clark, 2019).

This policy has had a major impact on practice in schools, removing the freedom of practitioners in England to include other approaches they consider to be appropriate for their individual children. The introduction of the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) in 2012 as a mandatory assessment for all children at the end of year 1 when the children are around six years of age has had further, even possibly unintended consequences, in narrowing the children's literacy experience in the early years. Teachers and parents have expressed concern at the effects of the check, including on children who can already read (Clark and Gazzard, 2018). As early as in many nursery and reception classes in many schools, children repeatedly practice real and non-words (pseudo words) in anticipation of the check, this continues for those who fail and are required to re-sit the check. This has become a high stakes test where schools are expected to achieve a higher percentage pass each year, and children who fail to read 32 of 40 words correctly are required to re-sit the check at the end of year 2. Now the school's percentage pass on the PSC tends to be a major focus in Ofsted judgements and is frequently cited by the Schools Minister Nick Gibb as evidence of improvement in reading, and, as a consequence of the government's insistence on synthetic phonics. We now see this policy also being required by Ofsted in institutions involved in initial teacher education, and from September 2020 Ofsted may enforce this policy even further, requiring that tutors present systematic synthetic phonics as the method of teaching early reading.

Effects of government phonics policy on primary schools in England

There is research evidence on the effects of the government's policy on classroom practice from observation, showing grouping for phonics as distinct from reading, even in nursery and reception classes (Bradbury and Russell-Holmes 2017). Carter in her research presents evidence through the voices of children (Carter, 2020a) and in a further article, Carter reports on the voices of the teachers, 'those closest to the implementation of the PSC...' (Carter 2020b). She supports her own research with evidence from other authors, who 'found that teachers had lost sight of why phonics is taught, and that phonics is not a

(Continued on page 10.)

(Continued from page 9.)

subject in its own right but a means to an end'. To quote from her Conclusion:
..these practices presented a tension between teaching to the test and reading development
(Carter, 2020b)

There is little evidence of any improvement in attainment other than on the actual check that can clearly be attributed to this policy, though the government does cite the results of PIRLS 2016, a claim that may be exaggerated (See Teaching Initial Literacy: Policies, evidence and ideology, Clark ed., 2018 Part II). At no time has Nick Gibb referred to lessons that England might learn from either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, both countries ranked statistically higher than England in PIRLS, yet both countries take a very different approach to reading-pedagogy and to collaboration with teachers. Nor does the minister reference the cautions in the reports on PIRLS against drawing causal relationships from the data, nor possible alternative explanations for this rise in ranking (Clark, 2018).

While consulting on other aspects of assessment policy, the Department for Education has not consulted either teachers or parents as to whether they regard the PSC as providing valuable information, or about whether the PSC should remain statutory (see Appendix I in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

Children, if they are to read with understanding, need to develop strategies for speedy recognition of words they have not met before. Like most academics I do not deny the importance of phonics in learning to read. However, there is evidence that this is better practised within context rather than in isolation. Time spent decoding words in isolation, or as in many schools in England on practising pseudo words to enable schools to achieve a high percentage pass on the PSC, might be better spent studying the features of real written English.

In a recent valuable guidance publication for teachers, the Education Endowment Foundation lists key recommendations for the teaching of literacy at Key Stage 1 (EEF, 2017). Three of the key recommendations are:

1. Develop pupils' speaking and listening skills and wider understanding of language.
2. Use a balanced and engaging approach to developing reading, which integrates both decoding and comprehension skills.
3. Effectively implement a systematic phonics programme.

Note the emphasis is on 'integration of decoding and comprehension' and that the reference is to a systematic phonics programme, not to synthetic phonics as the only approach as currently required in England.

Ideology rather than consultation?

In written answers to questions and in his speeches, Nick Gibb repeatedly claims that current policy is 'evidence-based'. Until recently the research cited by the Minister in support of synthetic phonics as the only method for initial teaching of reading was that conducted in Clackmannanshire in Scotland around 2005 and this is still cited also by Ofsted. When considering this 'evidence' it is important to note that:

- The research cited was conducted in 2005
- Its methodology has been seriously criticised (see for example Ellis and Moss, 2014)
- As early as 2006 a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate in Scotland expressed concern at low standards of literacy in Clackmannanshire and in 2016 Clackmannanshire commissioned an independent enquiry which produced a damning report on literacy standards, as a consequence of which the county now has in place a different policy to improve the county's standards of literacy.

In an interview in 2018 Nick Gibb added a reference to research conducted in 2000 in USA by the National Reading Panel. Readers are referred to an edited book by Allington (2002) which includes a critical appraisal of the phonics aspect of the National Reading Panel Research by members of the panel who raised concerns about claims made in and for that report. A summary of the evidence is available (in Clark, 2019: 11-12). The themes referred to by Allington have been analysed in work which has sought to investigate the connections between the political espousal of a strong emphasis on 'phonics first' and the rapid growth of both commercial programmes and of consultancy in schools. Such work identifies the power and ideological

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influences of consultants within policy and practice in the realm of reading, in particular of early reading in England (Ellis and Moss, 2014; Gunter and Mills). These themes and their influence on the perceptions of professionals and on practice in initial teacher education will be further explored in our research report in Chapter 5 (Clark et al, 2020 in press). It should be noted that a similar pattern can be identified within early reading policy in Australia as reported by several professional organisations there. In *Reading the Evidence: synthetic phonics and literacy learning* these developments in both England and in Australia are outlined, in the appendices the relevant documents, including those issued by UKLA, and ALEA and PETAA in Australia, are reprinted, showing that these associations were not opposed to the teaching of phonics as was being claimed by both governments (See Clark, 2017 including the Appendices, and Appendix III in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

In our independent survey of the views of teachers and parents on the Phonics Screening Check we found that many expressed disquiet at the effects of the pass-fail nature of the check, the requirement to re-sit the check should a child 'fail', the fact that half the words are non-words and the consequent emphasis on practising such words. Even many parents whose children had passed the check, or who could read, were disturbed at the negative effects on their children's reading as a consequence of the dominance of decoding in classrooms, particularly of non-words in preparation for the check. Many teachers thought the check should cease as it told them nothing they did not already know and both many teachers and parents thought that at least it should no longer be mandatory (Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

In view of this evidence it seems important to call for a consultation on the future of the Phonics Screening Check involving parents and teachers rather than allow this expenditure to continue unchallenged (see Appendix II in Clark and Glazzard, 2018).

Initial teacher education in England since 2012

In 2012 Chief Inspector of Education Sir Michael Wilshaw issued an edict that: "Ofsted will sharpen its focus on phonics in routine inspections of all initial teacher education provision – primary, secondary and Further Education. Ofsted will start a series of unannounced inspections solely on the training of phonics teaching in providers of primary initial teacher education." (Clark, 2016: 127)

Evidence from professionals involved in initial teacher education and from newly qualified teachers reveals that many institutions involved in initial teacher education have narrowed their literacy courses to comply with this edict. Gardner who taught in a university in England from 2004 to 2012 as a teacher educator, experienced the government's determination to enforce this policy within universities involved in initial teacher education (see Gardner: 28 in Clark, 2017). Hendry in a recent article reports a study in which she observed teachers in training and interviewed them as they became newly qualified teachers (Hendry, 2020).

Her study commenced in 2013 which she claims marked an important change in the delivery of ITE in England: "University-led postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) routes were required to increase the number of days that student teachers spent in school from 90 to 120 in their 38 week courses.... This change reflected government scepticism about universities' contribution to teacher preparation...and an emphasis on school led professional training rather than education for future teachers... As a consequence, university based time to engage with theory and pedagogy for teaching early reading was limited and the role of the school-based mentor became increasingly significant." (Hendry, 2020: 58)

In her study she found that: "The participants' experiences highlighted the focus on phonics teaching as the main priority in the teaching of reading in the 20 schools involved in the study. As a consequence the student teachers received limited examples of wider pedagogy and a rich environment for teaching reading....With one or two exceptions reading experiences were focused on phonetically decodable texts and phonics schemes."

She concluded that: "In essence when assessment and curriculum guidance prioritise one method for teaching reading, universities must work with schools, students and NQTs to re-establish a broader understanding of what it means to be an effective teacher of early reading." (Hendry: 67)

Government policy with regard to synthetic phonics is likely to have been prioritised since at least

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2012 in courses of initial teacher education in England. We have been investigating this in our current research by an independent online survey which had responses from 38 professionals involved in initial teacher education in England and with interviews of ten of those who completed the online survey. We hope that our research will be available to read and download from the Newman website by April 2020 (Clark et al, 2020).

Initial teacher education inspection framework and handbook from 2020: Consultation Document issued January 2020 with responses by 3 April 2020

Since the completion of our research, in January 2020, Ofsted issued a consultation document on initial teacher education with the new policy to be implemented in September 2020 (Ofsted, 2020). It is stated: that: “36. We will judge fairly partnerships that take radically different approaches to the ITE curriculum. We recognise the importance of partnerships’ autonomy to choose their own curriculum approaches. If leaders are able to show that they have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, then inspectors will assess the partnerships curriculum favourably.” (9) “91. Ofsted does not advocate that any particular teaching approach should be used exclusively with trainees.....” (22) “The ITE curriculum is designed to equip trainees with up-to-date research findings, for example as outlined for primary and secondary phase trainees in the ITT core content framework.” (40)

However, there are numerous quotations in the document referring to the need for institutions to require systematic synthetic phonics as the only way to teach early reading. Two examples of such statements are:

For primary phase, training will ensure that trainees learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics as outlined in the ITT core content framework and that trainees are not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence...39)

An institution will be deemed Inadequate if:

Primary training does not ensure that trainees only learn to teach reading using systematic synthetic phonics (44)

Under Leadership and management, on page 46, and again on page 47, reference is made to the need in the primary phase for: ‘Thorough training in the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics’.

On page 53 It is stated that leadership and management are likely to be inadequate if one or more of the following apply:

For early years and primary programmes mentors do not support the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. Some trainees (it is claimed) are being poorly prepared to teach systematic synthetic phonics after the completion of their course. (Ofsted, 2020)

There are no such edicts for any other subjects in primary or secondary schools in the document. No references are cited in the consultation document to justify this policy, removing as it does from professionals any freedom of choice in their presentation of literacy. Associated Ofsted/ DfE documents have long, and in some cases dated reference lists. None of the references refer specifically to evidence on synthetic phonics (DfE, 2019). Yet it would appear that following the recent Ofsted report Bold Beginnings, decoding, and in particular synthetic phonics, and preparation for the Phonics Screening Check may dominate reading in reception classes and years 1 and 2 in England and recently trained teachers will have had their initial teacher education courses in the institutions, and their observations in schools, dominated by synthetic phonics.

Should the proposed changes in initial teacher education be implemented in England in September 2020:

- Will tutors involved in literacy courses in initial teacher education retain any control over the content of their literacy courses?
- Will teachers in primary schools be equipped to critique this government mandated policy?
- Will teachers have any awareness of the approach to literacy teaching in other countries, or even that these may be different (even in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland)?

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‘Get readers on the wavelength of emotions’: A preliminary thematic survey.

By Emma Butler and Ben Screech

Department of Education, University of Gloucestershire.

This article will introduce and discuss a new research project being piloted by the University of Gloucestershire, in Cheltenham, UK (funded by the European research funding body ERASMUS); and carried out in collaboration with research partners and NGOs in Italy, Romania and Lithuania. The title of this project is: ‘Get readers on the wavelength of emotions’ (abbreviated to the acronym ‘GROWE’).

The GROWE project aims to develop both teacher trainers’ and teachers’ competences to address students’ literacy and socio-emotional learning needs. Teachers of diverse disciplines, not just language and literature teachers, will develop their skills to implement disciplinary literacy, whilst also simultaneously developing their skills to facilitate social and emotional learning. This dual aim will result in their students learning both meaningful reading and writing strategies and learning key intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Authentic texts for young people will be the platform from which this dual aim is launched.

The European Literacy Policy Network (ELINET) recommends that all teachers receive effective initial teacher education and professional development in literacy teaching and learning in order to be suitably prepared for the tasks of ensuring all Europeans are able to read and write at a level that enables them to function and develop in society, at home, at school and at work, in order to achieve their aspirations as individuals, family members, workers and citizens (ELINET, 2016). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identified, partly in response to the most recent reading scores from the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), that students will need a ‘broad mix of skills, including strong cognitive and socio-emotional skills’ to thrive in our rapidly changing knowledge-based society (OECD, 2019). These recommendations start to make the case for GROWE’s integrated approach.

Disciplinary literacy focuses on the specifics of reading, writing, and communicating within a discipline. Essentially, the concept is interested in the ways of thinking, the skills, and the tools used by experts in the disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Each discipline has a specialized vocabulary and components unique to that discipline and secondary students need to be therefore taught the “nuanced differences in producing knowledge via written language across multiple disciplines” (Moje, 2007, p. 9), which can be best achieved by using authentic texts (i.e. not school textbook) – high quality fiction and non-fiction literature for young people. Dunkerly-Bean & Bean assert that:

‘Disciplinary literacy is based upon the idea that literacy and text are specialized, and even unique, across the disciplines. Historians engage in very different approaches to reading than mathematicians do, for instance. Similarly, even those who know little about maths or literature can easily distinguish a science text from a literary one...’ (2017, N.P.A).

Disciplinary literacy then, emphasises mastery of the key knowledge, abilities and language inherent

“The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identified, partly in response to the most recent reading scores from the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), that students will need a ‘broad mix of skills, including strong cognitive and socio-emotional skills’ to thrive in our rapidly changing knowledge-based society (OECD, 2019).”

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to specific academic disciplines. It implies that literacy skills must span the curriculum and not be purely the domain of English classes. Social and emotional learning concerns the holistic development of young people which will enable them to relate to the world and navigate its opportunities and challenges successfully (Yoder, 2014). It is a process, according to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), through which they will ‘acquire and apply the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions’ (CASEL, 2019a). The five core competencies identified by CASEL, which underpin this process, cover affective, social and cognitive competences and the emphasis falls on intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills.

Extensive research has been carried out over the last two decades examining the role social and emotional skills play in preparing young people more effectively for the world of work, in ensuring deeper personal fulfilment, and crucially for the GROWE project, in facilitating academic growth (Zins et al., 2004; Cefai and Cavioni, 2014; Park et al., 2017). Research indicates, however, that for these benefits to be optimised, whole-school approaches need to be adopted and, best of all, is if socio-emotional teaching is integrated across the curriculum, rather than delivered in discrete programmes (CASEL, 2019c; Hill et al., 2008; Elias, 2004). This gives further support to GROWE’s integrated approach. In keeping with the current ERASMUS agenda as well as our beliefs as a partnership of educators, driven by a mutual sense of shared social responsibility, our research and intervention will be focused on supporting young peoples’ development in contexts of socio-economic disadvantage. Uniquely however, our project will endeavour to ‘tie’ disciplinary literacy teaching to social and emotional learning development. Our main objective in GROWE is essentially to increase our partner organisations’ capacity to support teachers in developing their students’ literacy and social-emotional skills in tandem. In so doing, we aim to develop and test an in-service teacher training course to prepare teachers for addressing students’ literacy and social-emotional learning needs and subsequently to this, to develop the aforementioned ‘toolkit’ (OER) indicative of good practice, to inspire teachers to adopt effective strategies for developing their students’ literacy and social-emotional skills in lower-secondary settings.

Assessing the impact

In terms of assessing the ultimate impact of our project, we anticipate that 12 teacher educators will be trained how to deliver the teacher training programme. As a result of this, 100 trained teachers will become highly skilled in developing literacy and social-emotional skills in the classroom while teaching various age groups and disciplines. 2500

students will therefore improve their literacy and social-emotional skills as a result of participating in classroom activities that pursue these goals explicitly, in addition to discipline-related learning objectives. Overall, 4 schools in four different European countries will adopt school-wide practices to improve literacy and social-emotional skills in an integrated manner, to support their students’ academic success and personal growth.

Addressing a perceived shortfall in social capital across the European Union, the ‘European Pillar of Social Rights’ states that European citizens have the right to ‘quality and inclusive education...in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society’ (European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2017, p.11). The European Commission has identified eight key competencies which will equip its citizens with the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to engage in lifelong learning (European Commission, 2018), and thereby becoming active citizens who will

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thrive in an increasingly complex world. Two of these mutually reinforcing competences are 'Literacy' and 'Personal, Social and Learning'. The GROWE project's integrated model of intervention will support disadvantaged students in the four participating countries to build their competences in these two key areas. The reason stems from our belief as a research partnership, that improved literacy skills and improved social and emotional skills, whilst ensuring lifelong learning capacities, will, in turn, foster more engaged citizens who will lead healthier and more meaningful personal and working lives in the future.

Considering how children read and the relationship and transference of their existing reading skills to a DL programme, where they will be identifying and utilising entirely new reading skills unique to specific disciplines, in addition to further honing more traditionally 'literary' reading skills such as inference and deduction, will be a crucial aspect of our research and writing of the GROWE training curriculum and subsequent toolkit. There is also a danger however, that the temptation may be to apply an 'English-lens' to the way we read concepts and content across the disciplines. Avoiding this will be crucial, and one way of ensuring this is to seek content-specific advice from experts. In addition to this however, Lent suggests that at the root of engaging disadvantaged teenagers and / or reluctant readers with reading across the disciplines is the need to initially ensure that a good breadth of high-quality texts is available to cater for a myriad of interests, reading abilities and tastes in different curriculum areas; in addition to ensuring adolescent learners are encouraged to 'shape their own reading through autonomy and ownership' (2015, p. 126).

An active and dynamic process

Lent also indicates the importance of reading constituting an 'active' and dynamic process in the DL classroom, highlighting the cruciality of 'deconstructing', 'stopping and talking', 'challenging' and 'writing questions'. In addition, the role of questioning in terms of DL is something that is raised routinely by Lent, as well as other texts listed in this literature review. With this in mind, we would advocate for the adoption of at least some of Chambers' taxonomy of questions designed to encourage 'book talk' with young people indicated in his book entitled: *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk* (1993). Whilst these are primarily intended to be used to unpack fictional texts, there are many questions that can be adapted to relate to both the overall experience of reading, in addition to the content knowledge students are developing through their engagement with texts, for example a question such as: Which aspects of the book helped you to understand the subject best and why? could help learners to elicit key content information from the text, to back up their newly-acquired knowledge of the subject.

We would ultimately suggest that the key thing we need to bear in mind, as researchers relatively new to this area of pedagogy, is the importance of maintaining a child-centred approach in our writing of the GROWE curriculum and associated tool-kit / OER. We believe this is particularly the case given our research and final product centres on young people in contexts of disadvantage, so seeking strategies to engage and, to quote Lent to 'give ownership' (2015, p.126) to young people over their reading (and; by proxy, their learning), is of considerable importance. This, we would argue, is particularly the case given that our target demographic has just passed the transition from primary to secondary school and, as the Woolcott Research findings demonstrate: 'something happens to the reading experience of young people to make it seem a lot less enjoyable when they reach secondary school than it was in primary school' (2001, p.19). With this in mind, we would therefore argue that with the inclusion of primary specialists within the GROWE partnership team at the University of Gloucestershire, we are in a potentially useful position in this regard, to consider which aspects of primary literacy (and cross-curricular combinations with literacy) practice may effectively translate to a lower-secondary setting, and how to bring about both 'enjoyment' and engagement in texts for the students who, we believe, will ultimately stand to benefit from GROWE.

Note from the authors at the University of Gloucestershire

Thank you for reading this article. We are looking for UK schools to contribute to this research project. If you are interested in taking part or finding out more, please email: Bscreech@glos.ac.uk

Only 20% of teachers believe baseline assessment tests are accurate

Research by UCL Institute of Education, has found that only 20% of teachers believe that the new Reception Baseline Assessment provides an accurate picture of current child attainment and 84% of survey respondents had described the RBA as an unreliable or inaccurate way to measure children's progress over seven years of primary school.

The research, which had analysed survey responses from 1285 early years and primary teachers and in-depth interviews with six case study primary schools, was commissioned by the National Education Union. The RBA, which is being trialled in half of all primary schools in England, is supposed to be a 20-minute one-to-one assessment between pupils and teachers conducted in the first few weeks of pupils starting school and it aims to assess language, communication and literacy skills and maths.

The researchers found that 69% of teachers believed that the RBA had not helped to develop positive relationships with pupils and despite the estimated length of assessment being 20 minutes, respondents had said that the tests consumed teacher time and interfered with the settling-in period which was also a child's first experience of school. Eighty-three per cent of teachers had reported that carrying out the assessment had increased their workload and so as not to interfere with early experience of reception class, some teachers had administered the baseline test in their own time. But survey respondents with a length of service under 3 years (13%) had regarded the RBA more positively than respondents with 3-12 years (2%) and over 12 years (3%).

Dr Guy Roberts-Holmes, Principal Investigator, said that contrary to claims that children did not know they were being tested, the research had found that children were well aware that they were taking a scripted computer test, and that they had a sense of whether they had performed well or badly.

The research into the 2019 Pilot of Reception Baseline Assessment, which had combined a survey of teachers' views with case studies of schools involved in the September 2019 pilot of Baseline, found that:

- Nearly 50% of teachers believed that Baseline had a negative impact on children, as some children had showed signs of anxiety and discomfort and they were afraid of "getting it wrong". 80% of teachers do not think that the Baseline test, which is intended to last for 20 minutes, provides an accurate picture of children's current attainment.
- 85% had reported that their school's own on-entry assessment of children provided them with better information than Baseline.
- 77% do not believe that Baseline had gave them useful information about their pupils which they would not otherwise have had. Many had described it as a "tick-box" exercise which devalued teachers' professional judgment about children and their learning needs.
- 69% said the Baseline had not helped to develop positive relationships with pupils.
- 83% said the carrying out Baseline had increased their workload.

"The researchers found that 69% of teachers believed that the RBA had not helped to develop positive relationships with pupils and despite the estimated length of assessment being 20 minutes, respondents had said that the tests consumed teacher time and interfered with the settling-in period which was also a child's first experience of school."

Children who read books daily score higher in school tests

What children choose to read outside school directly influences their academic performance, according to a study led by the University of Malaga and UCL Institute of Education. Using longitudinal census data to look at more than 43,000 students, aged 10 to 11 and again when they were 13 to 14, the research provided substantial evidence that pupils who enjoy reading high-quality books daily score higher in tests.

The average marks of pupils who read books had risen by 0.22 points overall, which was the equivalent of 3 months' worth of additional secondary school academic growth. The study demonstrated no similar advantage for children reading daily newspapers, comics or magazines, and only marginal benefits from short stories.

Co-author Professor John Jerrim, from the IoE said that while three months' worth of progress may sound comparatively small, it equated to more than 10% of the three academic secondary school years measured, from when the young people were aged 11 years old to 14, which has a hugely developmental period. He argued that in an increasingly digital world, it was important to encourage young people to find time to read a good book, as other less complex and less engaging forms of reading were unlikely to bring the same benefits for their cognitive development, and should not be counted as part of their reading time, particularly for low-achievers, where any association was likely to be strongest.

This study, which looked at pupils in Spain, attempted to establish whether there was a link between literacy and mathematics scores and the type of material that children looked at in their spare time, as well as how long they spent doing so. Comics, short stories, books, newspapers and magazines had been included in the research. The researchers had used data from a census carried out by the Andalusian Agency of Education Assessment., which had included questionnaire responses completed during 2008 to 2009 by 10 to 11-year-olds, and from those aged 13 to 14 during 2011 and 2012.

The study also highlighted the reading patterns across different groups of children, which showed that:

- Girls seemed to read short stories, books and newspapers more frequently than boys, while the opposite was true for comics and magazines.
- Young people from advantaged backgrounds read all the text types more frequently than those from disadvantaged homes.
- High-achieving students (according to their 5th grade test scores) had been more likely to read tales/short novels and books compared to low-achieving students, but there had been little difference in terms of reading comics, newspapers and magazines.

Does it matter what children read? New evidence using longitudinal census data from Spain, was published in the peer-reviewed journal Oxford Review of Education.

“The average marks of pupils who read books had risen by 0.22 points overall, which was the equivalent of 3 months’ worth of additional secondary school academic growth. The study demonstrated no similar advantage for children reading daily newspapers, comics or magazines, and only marginal benefits from short stories.”

Low-attaining students' writing becoming less formal

Research by Cambridge Assessment, recently published in the journal, *Language and Education*, has shown that the use of non-standard/dialectal English in 16-year-old students' formal examination writing has increased over time and the trend has mainly affected low-attaining students.

The researchers, Filio Constantinou and Lucy Chambers, examined the writing of 16-year-old students who had taken Level 2 (GCSE-level) English Language examinations in 2004 and 2014. They found that the number of students who had used non-standard English had risen from 19% to 29% in the space of a decade. The researchers found a wide range of examples of non-standard English in students' writing and the most commonly-used non-standard features were:

- Past tense and past participle forms of irregular verbs, e.g. "the midwife done an ultrasound", "I had saw a small alley".
- Lack of subject-verb agreement, e.g. "they was walking", "he don't want to lose".
- Object pronouns in compound subjects, such as, "me and her are both females".
- Adjective used as an adverb, such as, "she handled everything good", "I had to get home quick".
- Use of "this" as an indefinite article, e.g. "I saw this girl", "there was this lady".

This rise in the use of informal written English had mainly occurred amongst lower attainers (students awarded a grade D or below in the English Language qualification overall), who in 2014, had made up 73% of all students using non-standard English.

The research concluded that more language support should be provided to students, especially low attaining ones, which focused on raising students' awareness of the differences between standard and non-standard English. The research also suggested that language education should be re-evaluated at regular intervals, as the language needed of student cohorts seemed to change over time.

The benefits of audiobooks on literacy

The National Literacy Trust's research review has shown that engagement with audiobooks can benefit children's reading skills and enjoyment, as well as their mental wellbeing and emotional intelligence. With audiobook sales predicted to overtake those of ebooks in 2020 and the popularity of the format amongst children increasing by 138% in the last year alone, the Trust set out to explore existing evidence on the role of audiobooks in supporting children's literacy inside and outside of the classroom.

The Audiobooks and literacy review, showed that audiobooks could widen children's access to literature as they offered easy access on many devices to a wide range of texts. They were also able to access more of a book than reading alone, as the listening experience deepened children's understanding of tone, pronunciation, accents and dialects.

The review also found evidence that listening to an audiobook required the same cognitive skills as reading in print, and it supported the development of skills that children needed to read including language comprehension and the ability to understand and retain information.

Some of the research had shown that listening to a human voice could elicit a stronger emotional response than reading a written narrative or watching a film, which indicated that audiobooks had the potential to support a child's emotional intelligence. Audiobooks were also found to be effective at engaging reluctant, struggling and developing readers. Children were able to access a wider range of stories through audiobooks, where difficulty understanding a written text was a barrier, and stories beyond their reading level were made accessible. The review stressed that the "cool factor" of listening to stories on a digital device was also particularly appealing to reluctant readers.

The ability to listen to a book as a family was found to be an important way of getting books into the home, and audiobooks also helped parents who struggled to read or lacked confidence reading to share stories with their children. The review pointed out that the rise of smart speakers had also facilitated the sharing of stories, as many services were launching storytelling apps.

Girls consistently outperforming boys in reading skills could be changing

While the global reading gap between girls and boys is closing, in most cases it is due to a decline in girls' performance, rather than an improvement in boys', according to Professor Francesca Borgonovi (UCL Institute of Education). Girls have consistently outperformed boys on reading tests for several decades around the world and a lack of motivation, a weak vocabulary, poor reading engagement and lack of role models have all been considered possible reasons for the disparity.

While the results from recent global student assessments would suggest that the global reading gap was closing, it was doing so because the performance of girls had declined. Professor Borgonovi pointed out that the PISA test had been designed so that the average student had a score of 500 and two-thirds of participating students had a score between 400 and 600. She said that among the 29 OECD countries with available data, the average performance of boys had been under that average (479 points in 2000, 476 in 2009 and 475 in 2018). By contrast, the average performance of girls had been above the average: 511 in 2000, 515 in 2009 but 505 in 2018.

But Professor Borgonovi explained that the averages masked large differences in the learning trajectories of high achieving and low achieving boys and girls, as the findings showed, for example, that among low achievers, the performance of both boys and girls had declined and girls had declined by 21 points while boys had declined by 13 points. On the other hand, among high achievers the performance of both boys and girls had improved, and there had been particularly large improvements within the boys' group (12 points among boys and three points among girls). Professor Borgonovi's concluded that the patterns suggested greater polarisation between low and high achievers, as the lowest-achieving girls had been going in the wrong direction.

She suggested that a possible reason for the difference could stem from changes in how the tests were carried out as the test had been paper-based until 2009 but it had been administered on computers in 2018. Some studies had indicated that boys performed better in some of the skills involved in reading digital texts and they may be motivated to perform well in tests that were delivered on computers.

Trends in who read for enjoyment and for how long did not appear to explain the evolution in reading achievement across different groups and changes in the amount of time devoted to reading for enjoyment had not been associated with changes in the performance of different groups of students.

Professor Borgonovi said that, although many parents and teachers worried that internet use reduced the effort teenagers invest in schoolwork and the amount of time that students spent on the internet soared between 2009 and 2018, the groups that had increased their internet use the most had not been the ones with the steepest performance declines.

She pointed out that some countries had managed to close the gender reading gap. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Slovenia and Sweden had all experienced improvements in boys' reading performance while girls' performance had remained stable or it had improved (albeit less markedly than boys).

In the UK, the picture was mixed. The gender reading gap had been lower in the UK than the average performance gap across OECD countries, as it had been 20 points in the UK while the average across the OECD had been 30 points. On average, boys in the UK had improved while girls had remained stable. But boys had not improved enough to lead to a statistically significant narrowing of the gender reading gap. Similarly, an analysis of which boys had improved suggested that advancements in reading performance had been concentrated among middle and high-achieving boys. Overall, the largest improvements had been seen in high-achieving girls, which indicated that the lowest achievers, both boys and girls, remained at risk of academic failure.

Professor Borgonovi said that the fact that the patterns were so similar across a range of countries suggested that a common set of cross-national issues were most likely to be responsible for the changes. She added that the fact that some education systems had bucked the general trend had been a reminder that local circumstances, policy choices and the work of individual educators could make a difference and promote the learning of both boys and girls.

The following written questions were answered in Parliament, from the time of the last issue of *Literacy Today* to the present.

House of Commons

Department for Education

Reading: Curriculum

John Hayes: [205190] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of allocating time within the National Curriculum for reading in book form.

Nick Gibb: Reading is an essential foundation to a child's education and the acquisition of knowledge. The National Curriculum aims to ensure that all pupils can read easily, fluently and with good comprehension, and requires pupils to study a range of books, poems and plays to develop a life-long love of literature. The National Curriculum does not prescribe teaching hours for any subject. It is for schools to decide how much time pupils spend reading.

Monday 14 January 2019

Schools: Literacy

Geraint Davies: [209286] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of English Hub schools having at least one member of staff who has received specialist speech, language and communication training.

Nick Gibb: Each of our 32 English Hubs will deploy 5 practising teachers as literacy specialists, to deliver early language and reading teaching support to local schools. These teachers will not be required to hold specific qualifications in special educational needs and disability (SEND), but they will be trained to support all children to learn to read.

Literacy specialists will also have access to the wide range of support available to all teachers. Since 2010, the Department has invested heavily in the development of resources and training to ensure that teachers are equipped to support pupils with specific types of SEND, including speech, language and communication needs. To be awarded qualified teacher status, trainees must satisfy the teachers' standards which include a requirement that they have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND, and are able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them. In addition, the Whole School SEND consortium, funded by the Department, has appointed new SEND regional leads who are bringing together practitioners and networks to build a community of practice, to help identify school improvement priorities and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

Tuesday 22 January 2019

Policy papers covering literacy

The following policy papers about or with relevance to literacy have been published in the period January to March 2020.

The 2020 Spending Review

Author: Philip Brien

Source: House of Commons Library

Document type: Research briefing note.

Published: Thursday 19 March, 2020

Reference: CBP-8855

Geographical coverage: England

Description: An overview of the spending envelope for the 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review, as announced in the March 2020 Budget. In the 2020 Spring Budget, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced the official start of the 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review. This was originally intended to be the second of this year's trilogy of big financial events (the other two being the Spring Budget we have just had, and the autumn Budget). However, given the rapidly changing nature of the coronavirus outbreak, it now seems likely that the plans will have to change. The timings of these events may be affected, and there may be a series of further financial measures to help to cope with the impact of the outbreak, in addition to the ones already announced at the Budget and on 17 March.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8855/>

COVID-19: Guidance for Educational Settings

Author: -

Source: Public Health England and the Department for Education

Document type: Policy guidance

Published: Friday 28 February, 2020

Reference: -

Geographical coverage: England

Description: This document produced by Public Health England gives guidance about the coronavirus, COVID-19, and what education settings should do if students or staff think they have caught it.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

Educational Opportunities for Children and Young People from Working-class Backgrounds

Author: Thomas Brown

Source: House of Lords Library

Document type: Lords Library Notes

Published: Tuesday 25 February, 2020

Reference: LLN-2020-0066

Geographical coverage: United Kingdom

Description: The educational opportunities available to children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are important to social mobility. This House of Lords Library briefing provides background information on this issue ahead of a debate on the subject on 5 March 2020.

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/LLN-2020-0066>

(Continued on page 31.)

(Continued from page 30.)

Public Libraries

Authors: John Woodhouse, Yago Zayed and Noel Dempsey

Source: House of Commons Library

Document type: Briefing paper

Published: Thursday 23 January, 2020

Reference: SN 05875

Geographical coverage: England, with some reference to the rest of the United Kingdom

Description: This Library paper gives a brief overview of public library services in England.

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05875>

Assessment and Testing in Primary Education in England

Author: Nerys Roberts

Source: House of Commons Library

Document type: Briefing paper

Published: Wednesday 8 January, 2020

Reference: CBP-7980

Geographical coverage: England

Description: This briefing paper provides information on SATs - or national curriculum assessments - in England. It looks at what is tested, when, and how the results are used. It also provides a brief overview of changes to primary assessment since 2010.

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7980>

Learning Disability

Authors: Elizabeth Parkin, Steven Kennedy, Andy Powell, Susan Hubble and Robert Long

Source: House of Commons Library

Document type: Briefing paper

Published: Friday 3 January, 2020

Reference: SN 07058

Geographical coverage: England

Description: House of Commons Library briefing on policies and services for people with a learning disability in England.

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07058>

Government statistical releases

This section lists all statistical releases from government departments and agencies relating to literacy published between January and March 2020. The date of publication is given, followed by the body publishing the statistics and the type of statistics covered. A description and a link to the release is given.

Number of Pupils and Schools Taking Part in PISA 2018: FOI release

6 March 2020

SGLD

Scottish government statistics

This single file provides information in response to an FOI request.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000015416/>

National Reading and Numeracy Tests and Entitlement to Free School Meals: 2019

27 February 2020

WG

Welsh government Statistics

This report gives data that examines the performance of pupils and presents aggregate test results for all pupils in year groups 2 to 9 for 2019. Main points:

- Overall, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) is lower than their non eligible counterparts (nFSM) in each of the national tests.
- eFSM pupils are between two and a half and four times less likely to achieve an age-standardised score above 115 in each of the national tests.
- eFSM pupils are between two and two and a half times more likely to achieve an age-standardised score below 85 in each of the national tests.

<https://gov.wales/national-reading-and-numeracy-tests-and-entitlement-free-school-meals-2019>

Abbreviations

BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
DEFRA	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfE	Department for Education
DoE(NI)	Department of Education (Northern Ireland)
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
NHS	National Health Service
NICTS	Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PHE	Public Health England
QW	Qualifications Wales
SGLD	Scottish Government Learning Directorate
SLC	Student Loans Company
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
STA	Standards and Testing Agency
YJANI	Youth Justice Agency for Northern Ireland
YJBEW	Youth Justice Board for England and Wales
WG	Welsh Government

This section reports on all parliamentary debates on literacy or related subjects from January to March 2020.

Public libraries

Lord Bird (CB) asked, following the publication of the report by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals and *The Big Issue, Public Libraries: The Case for Support*, on 15 October 2019, what plans the Government had to invest in England's public libraries. (House of Lords, oral question debate, 3 February 2020.)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Baroness Barran (Con) said that in December 2019, the Government had announced proposals to increase local government resources by £2.9 billion, which meant that spending power would rise by 4.4% in real terms in the year 2020-21. She added that the Government was also investing £125 million, through the cultural investment fund, in regional museums and libraries over five years, starting in 2021.

Lord Bird said that the problem cross-government was that while the minister for the creative industries was in charge of promoting libraries, the local government minister spent the money. He added that 6,000 people had lost their jobs in libraries and there had been 10% shrinkage in libraries, but there had been no intervention by the ministry of culture.

Baroness Barran said she would like to see some progress on government departments working closer together. She pointed out that the establishment of the Libraries Taskforce, together with the Local Government Association, and the establishment of a clear five-year strategy up to 2021, would deliver a Libraries strategy. The minister added that for the first time, there was some data on libraries; whereas not long ago, the Government had had no idea how many libraries there were.

Lord Howarth of Newport (Lab), a former Parliamentary Under Secretary for Education in both Conservative and then Labour governments, pointed out that people went to public libraries not only to find books but sometimes to learn digital skills, or to access their social security benefits. He argued that the wholesale closures of public libraries over the last 10 years had been an "assault" not only on the concept that reading and learning were precious in themselves but on the very principle of community. Baroness Barran agreed that libraries represented an anchor within communities and they were often used by the young, those not in employment and those from black and minority communities. But she pointed out that about a quarter of libraries had seen their visits grow since 2010 and there had been divergence in how libraries had responded to the needs of their communities.

Lord Tope (LDP), co-chairman of the Libraries All Party Parliamentary Group, said that while the cultural investment fund had been very welcome, only 10% of it had been allocated to libraries, and it had all been capital. He argued that the problem libraries had, which had led to closures, was the lack of revenue funding. Baroness Barran said that the funding split between museums and libraries had not yet been determined. She pointed out that in terms of revenue funding, both elements were important and the successful libraries were the ones that were being most innovative in responding to the needs of their communities, including in digital literacy and other services that they offered. The minister added that the funding settlement for local authorities would help to contribute to sustaining that.

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab) asked the minister whether the five-year plan she had announced would undo the losses of the 10-year lack of a plan that was ending. Baroness Barran said that while she did not want to guess at the Dispatch Box, there was "massive" divergence between the top-performing libraries, which were the 25% which were seeing their footfall grow, and those which were seeing their footfall decline. She said that the Government was trying to understand from the very successful libraries how to replicate that success more broadly across the country. The minister added that commissioned libraries appeared to be disproportionately represented in that rapidly growing element, which would suggest that there was also something about visibility of funding which helped in terms of planning.

Literacy and Synthetic Phonics

Michael Tomlinson (Con, Mid Dorset and North Poole) asked the Prime Minister to ensure a continued focus on the most disadvantaged, especially when it came to vital literacy and numeracy skills. (House of Commons, oral questions to the Prime Minister, 8 January 2020.)

The Prime Minister, Boris Johnson (Con, Uxbridge and South Ruislip) paid tribute to Nick Gibb (Con, Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) who had campaigned for so long for synthetic phonics, which had done such a huge amount to help children to read. He added that England was the only country in the G7 where the reading performance of disadvantaged pupils had actually improved since 2009.

P A R L I A M E N T - Q U E S T I O N S

The following written questions were answered in Parliament, from the time of the last issue of *Literacy Today* to the present. The period covered is January to March 2020.

House of Commons

Department for Education

Pupils: Literacy

Stephen Morgan: [452] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what the literacy rate is amongst people aged eight to 15 in (a) Portsmouth and (b) the UK.

Nick Gibb: The Department for Education assesses pupils in England via end of Key Stage 1 assessments when pupils are typically age 7, end of Key Stage 2 assessments when pupils are typically age 11, and end of Key Stage 4 (GCSE) exams when pupils are typically age 16.

The Department publishes attainment, in headline measures for state-funded schools, at the end of Key Stage 2 by local authority, region and all of England. An extract from the latest figures for 2018-19 are in the table below, relating to attainment in reading and writing. At Key Stage 2 English reading is assessed via tests and writing via teacher assessments.

Table 1 - Key Stage 2 English results in 2019 for Portsmouth local authority and state funded schools in England

Students meeting English reading Expected standard	Students meeting English reading higher standard	Students meeting English writing higher standard	Students meeting English writing greater depth
Portsmouth 67%	22%	76%	11%
England (statefunded schools) 74% 2	7%	79%	20%

Key Stage 2 local authority data, including for previous years[1], is available at the following link[2]: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-2>.

For students at the end of Key Stage 4, there is no assessment of literacy skills, nor reading and writing

separately. As a proxy, Table 2 provides the percentage of students entering the English element of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), and the percentage attaining a standard pass (grade 9-4).

Table 2 - EBacc English results in 2019 for Portsmouth local authority and state funded schools in England

% of students entering EBACC English[3]		% of students achieving A GRADE 4 or above in EBACC English
Portsmouth	93.4%	67.5%
England (state-funded schools)	95.8%	75.6%

Local authority data, including for previous years, is available at the following link[4]:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-gcses-key-stage-4>.

[1] Due to change in methodology and headline measures at Key Stage 2, figures are only comparable between 2009-10 to 2014-15 and 2015-16 to 2016-17. Changes made within the 2017-18 writing teaching assistant frameworks mean that judgements in 2018 are not directly comparable to those made using the previous interim frameworks in 2016 and 2017.

[2] For each year, select the 'revised' publication and then open the 'Local authority and regional tables'. For 2015-16 to 2016-17 the headline measures are the percentage of students reaching the expected standard and can be found in tables L1, L2 and L3. For 2009-10 to 2014-15 the headline measures are the percentage achieving L4 or above and can be found in tables 12-16 (2013-14 to 2014-15); tables 12-15 (2012-13); tables 13-15 (2011-12); table 11 (2010-11); table 18 (2009-10 – in the 'national and local authority tables').

[3] Pupils must achieve at least a grade 4 in English at the end of Key Stage 4 or are required to resit in post-16 education. Therefore, entry and achievement at grade 4 in EBacc English has been used as a proxy for 'literacy' for pupils at the end of Key Stage 4. For more information about EBacc, go to:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/progress-8-school-performancemeasure>.

[4] For each year, select the 'revised' publication and then open the 'local authority tables'.

Thursday 9 January 2020

Basic Skills: Primary Education

Michael Tomlinson: [13003] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase numeracy and literacy rates of primary school students from lower income households in the UK.

Michael Tomlinson: [13004] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase numeracy and literacy rates of primary school students from lower income households in Poole.

Michael Tomlinson: [13005] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to increase numeracy and literacy rates of primary school students from lower income households in Dorset.

Michael Tomlinson: [13006] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps his Department has taken to increase the levels of literacy and numeracy in Dorset.

Michael Tomlinson: [13007] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps his Department has taken to increase the levels of literacy and numeracy in Poole.

Michael Tomlinson: [13008] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps his Department has taken to increase the levels of literacy and numeracy throughout the UK.

Nick Gibb: The Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy and numeracy standards to ensure that all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can read fluently and have knowledge of the fundamentals of mathematics. To support literacy standards, the Department introduced the light touch phonics screening check for Year 1 pupils in 2012. Since then, performance has improved, with 82% of pupils meeting the expected standard in 2019, compared to 58% when the check was introduced.

In 2018, the Department launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme. The programme is led by 34 primary schools across England and supports nearly 3000 schools across England to improve their teaching of reading through systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure. The English Hubs are focused on improving educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils in Reception and Year 1. Broadclyst Community Primary School is working closely with nine schools across the Dorset area, and aims to support up to 85 schools across Dorset, West Somerset and Devon.

To support mathematics standards, the Department funds a network of 37 Maths Hubs which provide school-based continuous improvement in mathematics education for all pupils from Reception year through to post-16 study in England. The Department is also investing in the £76 million Teaching for Mastery programme, which is based on teaching methods in the highest performing jurisdictions and aims to reach 11,000 schools from 2016 to 2022. This includes a 'mastery readiness' programme to support schools with the greatest need. We have seen good progress in mathematics – in 2019, 79% of pupils across all schools in England met the expected standard at Key Stage 2 in maths. This is an increase of 9% since new tests were introduced in 2016 and includes a 3% rise in the latest results. Maths Hubs engaged with 84 schools in the Poole and Dorset local authorities in the last academic year (2018-19), and they aim to support another 99 in the current academic year (2019-20).

Wednesday 12 February 2020

English Language and Mathematics: GCSE

Neil O'Brien: [18949] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, since the introduction of the GCSE resit policy for maths and English, how many and what proportion of 16-18 year olds resat (a) maths GCSE, (b) English GCSE and (c) both maths and English GCSE by (i) household income and (ii) special education needs.

Neil O'Brien: [18950] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, since the introduction of the GCSE resit policy for maths and English in England, how many and what proportion of students resitting sat those exams (a) once, (b) twice and (c) more than twice.

Neil O'Brien: [18951] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, since the introduction of the GCSE resit policy in maths and English, how many and what proportion of 16-18 year olds resat (a) maths GCSE, (b) English GCSE and (c) maths and English GCSE and were also enrolled on (i) Level 3 courses, (ii) Level 2 courses, (iii) Level 1 courses and (iv) other courses.

Nick Gibb: The information requested is not routinely available in 16 to 18 publications and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The closest available information can be found in tables 11a and 11b as part of the 'A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2018 to 2019 (revised)' [1] national statistics, which were released on the 23 January 2020. Students who are continuing to study English and mathematics, who are not yet at the end of 16 to 18 study, or who had previously achieved a grade 4/C or above in these subjects, will not be included in these figures. [1] A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2018 to 2019 (revised): <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2018-to-2019-revised>. Please refer to table 11a "Matrix of prior attainment and progress point scores in GCSE English and other English qualifications by students at the end of 16- 18 studies", and table 11b "Matrix of prior attainment and progress point scores in GCSE mathematics and other mathematics qualifications by students at the end of 16-18 studies".

Monday 2 March 2020

Speech and Language Disorders: Children

Helen Hayes: [20532] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Health and Social Care on developing a cross government strategy to support children with speech, language and communication needs.

Vicky Ford: Ministers and officials from the department and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) are in regular contact and are working together to implement the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reforms underpinned by the Children and Families Act 2014.

This includes discussions about the needs of children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and how, across the government, we can address them. For example, both departments worked closely in responding to the Bercow 10 Years On report and other reports, which have raised a range of important issues for children and young people, including those with SLCN, which were relevant to both departments.

The department has also established the SEND System Leadership Board, which aims to improve strategic commissioning and joint working between education, health and social care partners for all SEND conditions, and includes membership from DHSC. Better joint commissioning and joint working are a high priority for Government and critical for improving services for children and young people with SEND, including those with SLCN. However, we recognise that there are concerns with the SEND system. We announced the SEND Review in September 2019 to ensure the system is working best for all families – including those who have children with SLCN - and that support in different areas is consistent, available and joined up across health, care and education services. This department is working with DHSC on the Review.

Monday 2 March 2020

Literacy: Children

Alex Norris: [23507] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of synthetic phonics lessons on children's reading outcomes since the introduction of the Phonics Partnership Grant programme in 2015.

Alex Norris: [23515] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of teaching synthetic phonics on the attainment gap between (a) advantaged and disadvantaged students and (b) boys and girls.

Nick Gibb: The Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards by ensuring all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can read fluently and with understanding. Evidence has shown that phonics is a highly effective component in the development of early reading skills, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our phonics performance is improving. In 2019, 82% of pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard in the phonics screening check, compared to just 58% when the check was introduced in 2012. The disadvantage gap in the phonics screening check has decreased from 17% in 2012, to 14% in 2019. The gender gap in the phonics screening check has fallen from 8% in 2012 to 7% in 2019. England achieved its highest ever score in reading in 2016, moving from joint 10th to joint 8th in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) rankings. This follows a greater focus on reading in the primary curriculum, and a particular focus on phonics. The average improvement of England's pupils in 2016 is largely attributable to two changes:

- In 2016, boys have significantly improved in their average performance compared to previous cycles; and
- England's lowest performing pupils have substantially improved compared to previous PIRLS cycles, which has narrowed the gap between the higher and lower-performing pupils.

Building on the success of our phonics partnerships and phonics roadshows programmes, in 2018, the Department launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme. We have appointed 34 primary schools across England as English Hubs. The English Hubs programme is supporting nearly 3000 schools across England to improve their teaching of reading through systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure. The English Hubs are focused on improving educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils in Reception and Year 1.

Thursday 5 March 2020

Literacy: Males

Alex Norris: [24413] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect on the educational attainment of white working-class boys of encouraging those boys to develop their (a) reading skills and (b) vocabulary at an early age.

Nick Gibb: The Department is committed to raising literacy standards – ensuring all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can read fluently and with understanding. Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects. Improving vocabulary and reading skills are fundamental parts of this. Our proposed reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage, including revisions to the curriculum activities and assessment goals under the seven areas of learning, are intended to improve early language and literacy outcomes for all children – particularly those from a disadvantaged background. We have also launched Hungry Little Minds – a three-year campaign to encourage parents to engage in activities that support their child’s language and literacy.

To continue improving early reading, in 2018 we launched the £26.3 million English Hubs Programme. We have appointed 34 primary schools across England as English Hubs. The English Hubs programme is supporting nearly 3000 schools across England to improve their teaching of reading through systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure. The English Hubs are focused on improving educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils in Reception and Year 1. Evidence has shown that phonics is a highly effective component in the development of early reading skills, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The disadvantage gap in the phonics screening check has decreased from 17% in 2012, to 14% in 2019.

Monday 9 March 2020

Pupils: Reading

Richard Holden: [22438] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will make an assessment of the effectiveness of Ofsted monitoring of schools’ policies on reading material provided to pupils for reading at home.

Nick Gibb: This is a matter for Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman. I have asked her to write to my hon. Friend and a copy of her reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Monday 9 March 2020

Literacy: Children

Paul Holmes: [24449] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the effect of e-reading in different mediums on children’s literacy.

Nick Gibb: The Department wants children to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information, whatever the format. Research suggests that reading for pleasure is more important for children's educational development than their parents' level of education. We have not undertaken research on the specific effect of e-reading, but the Department is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards – ensuring all children can read fluently and with understanding.

In 2018, we launched the £26.3 million English Hubs Programme. We have appointed 34 primary schools across England as English Hubs. The English Hubs programme is supporting nearly 3,000 schools across England to improve their teaching of reading through systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure. The English Hubs are focused on improving educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils in Reception and Year 1.

Tuesday 10 March 2020

Literacy

Scott Benton: [25198] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to encourage people to take part in adult literacy programmes in (a) Blackpool and (b) England.

Gillian Keegan: The adult education budget (AEB) fully funds or co-funds skills provision for eligible adults aged 19 years and above from pre-entry to level 3, to support adults to gain the skills they need for work, an apprenticeship or further learning. This includes fully funded courses in English and maths, for adults aged 19 years and above who need to improve their literacy and numeracy, and fully funded first full level 2 or level 3, or both, for learners aged 19 to 23 years.

From the 2019/20 academic year, approximately 50% of the AEB has been devolved to six mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) and the Mayor of London, acting where appropriate through the Greater London Authority (GLA). These authorities are now responsible for the provision of AEB-funded adult education for their residents and allocation of the AEB to providers. The Education and Skills Funding Agency will continue to be responsible for the remaining AEB in non-devolved areas, including Blackpool.

Wednesday 11 March 2020

Reading

Paul Holmes: [24448] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to (a) encourage young people to read and (b) promote reading for pleasure in (i) Eastleigh constituency, (ii) England and (iii) the UK.

Nick Gibb: The Department is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards – ensuring all children can read fluently and with understanding. Literacy skills are underpinned by communication and language skills developed in the early years. Our proposed reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage, including revisions to the curriculum activities and assessment goals under the seven areas of learning, are intended to improve early language and literacy outcomes for all children.

We have also launched Hungry Little Minds – a three-year campaign to encourage parents to engage in activities that support their child's language and literacy. The Hungry Little Minds website gives parents access to video tips, advice and suggested apps and games to help with early learning for their children from age 0 to 5. Evidence has shown that phonics is a highly effective component in the development of early reading skills, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our phonics performance is improving. In 2019, 82% of pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard in the phonics screening check, compared to just 58% when the check was introduced in 2012. Reflecting our

commitment to encouraging early reading, in 2018 we launched the £26.3 million English Hubs Programme. We have appointed 34 primary schools across England as English Hubs. The English Hubs programme is supporting nearly 3,000 schools across England to improve their teaching of reading through systematic synthetic phonics, early language development, and reading for pleasure. The English Hubs are focused on improving educational outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils in Reception and Year 1. To note, Springhill Catholic Primary School in Southampton is an English Hub, and covers Eastleigh and other constituencies. Education is a devolved matter and the Department is only responsible for policy in England. The Scottish and Welsh Governments are responsible for education policy in Scotland and Wales.

Wednesday 11 March 2020

Primary Education: Assessments

Rupa Huq: [27606] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of Reception Baseline Assessments.

Vicky Ford: The purpose of the reception baseline assessment (RBA) is to form the starting point for reception to year six progress measures in primary schools. The RBA has undergone a thorough review process to ensure that it is fit for purpose, including a national pilot. Data from over 340,000 assessments has now been analysed and shows that the assessment is valid and fit for purpose. The department has recently published the reception baseline assessment validity report, demonstrating the evidence that has been gathered throughout the assessment development process, showing the assessment to be an accurate assessment of children's starting points. The report can be found at the link below:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reception-baseline-assessment-validityreport>.

Tuesday 17 March 2020

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Public Libraries: Closures

Stephen Morgan: [453] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps her Department is taking to prevent library closures.

Helen Whately: Local authorities in England have a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. It is for individual local authorities to decide how best to provide a public library service that meets local needs within their available resources. The net expenditure on the library service by local authorities in England increased in 2018/19 from 2017/18.

DCMS works across central and local government to encourage investment in libraries to ensure they can continue to support the delivery of local and national priorities and needs. The DCMS funded Libraries Taskforce was established, by DCMS and the Local Government Association, to devise and implement the "Libraries Deliver" strategy which is helping support and reinvigorate the public library service in England. It has worked with sector partners to advocate for libraries and to share and promote good practice to help libraries better serve their communities.

In October 2019 DCMS also announced the £250 million Cultural Investment Fund, of which over £125 million will be invested in regional museums and libraries over five years from 2020/21. The funds will be used to upgrade buildings and technology so public libraries across England are better placed to respond to the changing ways people are using them.

Tuesday 14 January 2020

Public Libraries: Computers

Kevin Brennan: [6615] To ask the Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the provision of computers in public libraries to enable access to public services.

Helen Whately: Local authorities in England have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. They are responsible for determining the delivery of a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities, including the provision of access to computers with internet access. No assessment has been made by DCMS; however public libraries are continuing to provide opportunities for people to get online and to access public services.

Monday 27 January 2020

World Book Day

Tracy Brabin: [14781] To ask the Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department is taking to support World Book Day 2020.

Helen Whately: DCMS has no Departmental plans to celebrate World Book Day in 2020 directly. However, over 90% of local authority public library services in England have expressed interest in participating in World Book Day activities. World Book Day has also put a message in the fifteen £1 books taking part in the World Book day campaign to encourage children and young people to join their local library.

Thursday 13 February 2020

Home Office

Immigrants: English Language

Stephen Timms: [18485] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many people are banned from the UK as a result of accusations of cheating by ETS in relation to its ToEIC test in the period 2011-14.

Kevin Foster: The exact information requested is not held centrally by the Home Office in a way that allows us to answer this question without manually checking individual case records which could only be undertaken at disproportionate cost.

Stephen Timms: [18486] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how much her Department has spent from the public purse on defending (a) appeals and (b) judicial reviews in cases where applicants were refused leave to remain on grounds of cheating in a ToEIC English language test.

Kevin Foster: The exact information requested is not held centrally by the Home Office in a way that allows us to answer this question without manually checking individual case records which could only be undertaken at disproportionate cost. The Home Office took commercial action against the provider which resulted in them agreeing, after negotiations, to pay a contribution of £1.6 million towards the Home Office's costs incurred as a result of this issue.

Wednesday 26 February 2020

Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government

English Language: Education

Fleur Anderson: [26195] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the Integrated Communities Action Plan published by his Department on 9 February 2019, what progress has been made on (a) the actions set out in the section entitled Boosting English language and (b) increasing the provision of ESOL classes with a creche.

Luke Hall: [Holding answer 11 March 2020]: The Department introduced the Integrated Communities English Language Programme in 2019/20, which delivers highly localised community-based English language provision in community buildings including schools, community centres and places of worship. By the end of the programme we anticipate it will have provided English language learning to over 19,000 people.

Building on the success of this programme, our new £6.5 million ESOL for Integration Fund 2020/21 was announced on 6 March. In addition, MHCLG have developed partnerships with 8 local authorities to improve the coordination of ESOL provision within their areas. DfE have also created a set of teaching resources for ESOL learners with limited literacy skills.

All families in England with children aged 3 and 4 are eligible for 15 hours a week of free early education. Eligible working families are also entitled to an additional 15 hours free childcare.

Wednesday 11 March 2020

Ministry of Justice

Prisoners: Literacy

Greg Knight: [35] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of the prison population who are illiterate; and what steps he is taking to tackle illiteracy in the prison population.

Lucy Frazer: The Department for Education publishes data on English & maths screenings undertaken when someone is received into prison. English screening data provides information on the proportion of prisoners who have very low levels of literacy. The most recent data available, for 2017/2018, can be found via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-education-andtraining>

For English, approximately 34% of prisoners were below the level expected of an 11- year-old. These prisoners would be regarded as having a high priority level of need. We have recently overhauled the prison education system, giving Governors control over the education budget for their prison, and have implemented two new prison education frameworks: the Prison Education Framework (PEF) and the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS).

Governors have the freedom to commission bespoke English education for prisoners with low levels of literacy through the PEF, aimed at addressing their high priority needs. The impact would be improvement in, for example, prisoners' reading and writing.

Tuesday 7 January 2020

House of Lords

Public Libraries

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to commission a review of the importance of access to public libraries in all parts of England, including consideration of the relationship between library access and (1) income, and (2) social class. [HL386]

Baroness Barran: Libraries play an important role in giving everyone opportunities to improve their life chances and achieve their full potential. They serve a diverse range of people from all backgrounds and provide access to a variety of services. The regularly published Taking Part Survey provides details of the proportion of adults who have used a public library service at least once in the previous 12 months. This includes details of use by upper and lower socio-economic groups, as well as by index of multiple deprivation. The figures for 2018/19 indicate that 36.7% of respondents from the upper socioeconomic group and 27.9% of respondents from the lower socio-economic group reported visiting a library in the last 12 months. We have no plans to conduct a review.

Wednesday 22 January 2020

Public Libraries: Visual Impairment

Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth: To ask Her Majesty's Government how they support the provision of library services to the blind and partially sighted. [HL903]

Baroness Barran: Local authorities in England have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service that meets local needs. Public libraries have a number of services and facilities available to support visually impaired library users. These include access to e-books and e-audio books, and in some cases the loan of e-book readers and other technology to enlarge the print.

Other services include specialist software and hardware to aid the use of computers and specific reading groups. Libraries Connected has developed the Six Steps Promise with the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Share the Vision to ensure libraries can support people with reduced vision. The promise includes a commitment to:

- Ensuring that all blind and partially sighted customers are connected to the most appropriate service for their reading needs and that they are able to make full use of an accessible public library service.
- Using Reading Sight, a free website supporting practitioners and blind and partially sighted people to access reading and reading services.
- Providing local collections of accessible reading materials and information in physical or digital formats, and the ability to signpost library users to a wider range of resources

Many public libraries will be taking part in the Share the Vision, HI VIS initiative over the two week period 1–14 June 2020. The initiative is a celebration of accessible library services and alternative formats and its aim is to champion and raise awareness of the range of library services and activities that are available to visually impaired people to access.

Thursday 13 February 2020

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