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**Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP**  
Minister of State for School Standards

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Mr Andrew Connell  
Chair, Council for Subject Associations  
By email: [a.connell@chester.ac.uk](mailto:a.connell@chester.ac.uk)

7 December 2020

Dear Mr Connell,

Thank you for your letter of 25 September, addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding support and guidance for teachers and schools. I am replying as the Minister of State for School Standards.

I am extremely sorry for the unacceptable delay in responding to your letter and to your concerns. This has been caused by a significant increase in the number of letters we have received alongside the increased workload for civil servants as we continue to tackle the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak for the education sector.

The Department appreciates the excellent work being accomplished by your members, and other schools and teachers, across the country.

On 10 November, Ofsted published a report on the effects of the coronavirus outbreak and has made clear the effect that this and lost education has had on young people, as well as the pressures on school staff. The report also highlights much of the work from the education sector in ensuring that children's life chances are not negatively affected by COVID-19. The Department continues to support all staff in schools to do their job effectively and to provide pupils with the best possible education.

We recognise staff wellbeing as a crucial element in the commitment to recruit and retain more teachers, as well as in supporting teacher quality. Last year, the Department set up an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) to advise on the wellbeing of staff in schools and colleges. Their recommendations were accepted by ministers and published in June 2020. As a result, we made a range of commitments to support the wellbeing of teachers and other education professionals in schools and colleges. These include the creation of a wellbeing charter for the teaching sector. The charter will help to create an open culture around wellbeing and mental health, breaking down stigma, and will include a range of commitments by the government and for employers in schools and colleges to promote and protect staff wellbeing.

Furthermore, we have taken a decisive action to respond to the mental health needs of school leaders, managing the pressures caused by COVID-19 by funding a new £95,000 pilot led by the Education Support Partnership to provide online peer support and telephone supervision from experts to around 250 school leaders. The pilot will conclude this month and will inform future wellbeing and mental health interventions.

The Government has also provided £8 million for The Wellbeing for Education Return programme, which is supporting staff in schools and colleges to respond to the additional pressures some children and young people may be feeling as a direct result of the pandemic, as well as to any emotional response they or their teachers may still be experiencing. Part of the funding will be used to recruit local experts to deliver the training programme to nominated staff in schools and colleges and provide advice to head teachers through to March 2021. Further information is available at: [tinyurl.com/Y2m3roao](https://tinyurl.com/Y2m3roao).

The Department's guidance for the full opening of schools promotes a broad and balanced curriculum, including the importance of reinstating extracurricular offers for the health and mental wellbeing of pupils. We agree that a policy for managing this needs to be decided at a school level, but we also acknowledge some of the difficulties that schools are currently facing. To support schools, we have provided practical guidance on how to restart different types of curricular and extracurricular activities and offer schools flexibility to decide how subjects such as physical education, sport and physical activity will be provided whilst following the measures in their system of controls. The guidance is available at: [tinyurl.com/YxbYhnmu](https://tinyurl.com/YxbYhnmu).

We also encourage schools to consider the provision of pastoral and extracurricular activities to all pupils designed to support the rebuilding of friendships and social engagement, address and equip pupils to respond to issues linked to COVID-19, and to support pupils with approaches to improving their physical and mental wellbeing. Ofsted has been looking at student wellbeing and the steps schools are taking as part of its programme of interim visits in the autumn term.

With regard to practical lessons and examinations, the Department's guidance for the full opening of schools also acknowledges that practical lessons will be more challenging in some subjects and that practices for examinations, including teacher assessment, will be affected. Practical science is a vital aspect of the science curriculum and an effective tool to engage students at all Key Stages. Although it may be challenging in the current circumstances, it is important for schools to adapt practical science so that it can still be achieved in safe and engaging ways. Guidance on health and safety for schools, including minimising the risks of COVID-19 transmission, can be found at: [tinyurl.com/YassJxxb](https://tinyurl.com/YassJxxb). The CLEAPSS's guidance on practical work during the COVID-19 outbreak, is available at: [tinyurl.com/Y5m8cPQm](https://tinyurl.com/Y5m8cPQm).

We know that examinations and assessments are the best and fairest way of judging pupils' performance. The Secretary of State has confirmed that next year's GCSE, AS level, and A level examination series will go ahead. The majority of examinations will take place three weeks later than usual, starting on 7 June and ending on 2 July for almost all GCSEs, AS levels, and A levels. Pupils will now have more time to prepare for their examinations next year, to help address the disruption caused by the outbreak.

The changes to next year's examination timetable are designed to release time for teaching and studying, and to take account of public health considerations. This, together with the changes to assessments announced by Ofqual, gives teachers, head teachers and pupils clarity on what will be assessed in examinations next summer. The changes will also reduce pressure on teaching time and ensure that young people taking examinations next year have the same opportunities to progress as pupils have in previous years.

To support newly qualified teachers, we recognise that the outbreak of COVID-19 will have had a profound effect on teachers, including those who are in training or are in their early career. The Department is committed to provide schools and teachers with the support required and we are working with the sector to understand schools' needs and the effect on those who are currently training or undertaking their newly qualified teacher (NQT) status year.

For schools welcoming NQTs, it is for each school to ensure an appropriate and personalised induction programme is in place, with a timetable that meets NQTs' development needs. On 15 July 2020, we published the 'Information for schools and NQTs for September 2020' webpage and this makes clear the benefits to supporting this year's cohort of NQTs. It also provides examples and links to resources that NQTs, schools and initial teacher training (ITT) partnerships, may find useful. This is available at: [tinyurl.com/YxateJfP](https://tinyurl.com/YxateJfP).

However, we recognise that this year has been uniquely challenging, and that virtually all early career teachers who started in September 2020 will have experienced a disrupted ITT course. It is more important than ever that those starting their careers receive quality support. Therefore, we have expanded the availability of a one year Early Career Framework (ECF) programme beyond the initial early rollout areas, reaching approximately 4,000 further early career teachers. Further information is available at: [tinyurl.com/Y3hw5bfl](https://tinyurl.com/Y3hw5bfl).

We have also ensured that all schools have access to the materials to deliver ECF based professional development, which were designed by leading training providers. This package will provide all schools with the materials they need to help their early career teachers continue their training and development and build their confidence in the areas they may have missed.

The bursaries offered by the Department for ITT are designed to incentivise more applications to ITT courses. As such, they are targeted at the phases and subjects that have previously not attracted sufficient applicants. All trainee teachers on tuition fee funded ITT routes can apply for a tuition fee loan and maintenance loan to support their living costs. Additional student finance is also available depending on individual circumstances, such as the Childcare Grant.

I appreciate the effect that COVID-19 has had on support staff. Since 1 September, the Department has been closely monitoring support staff levels by collecting data on staff absences. We are currently looking at the quality of those data with a view to publishing as part of the official statistics series. We have also published school workforce planning guidance, which provides further advice to support schools with managing staffing levels. This is available at: [tinyurl.com/Gnb79ab](https://tinyurl.com/Gnb79ab).

I am grateful for to you and your members for all the work you are doing to continue supporting teachers. The commitment of teachers to meet the demands of this year have been exceptional. The Department is focused on supporting schools in all the ways we can and is continuously considering options to support schools and value others' contributions in this process. I am grateful for your kind offer of support.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Gold'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.