

# Education Secretary statement to Parliament on national lockdown

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement regarding schools in national lockdown.

The last thing any Education Secretary wants to do is announce that schools will close and this is not a decision that the government ever wanted to take.

I would like to reassure everyone that our schools have not suddenly become unsafe, but limiting the number of people who attend them is essential when the COVID rates are climbing as they are now. We must curb the escalating cases of COVID throughout the country and prevent the NHS from being overwhelmed. That is why today I am setting out the contingency plans I had prepared but had hoped to never have to implement.

I would like to thank all our teachers, all our education staff and social workers for all they have been doing to keep children and young people safe and learning.

During lockdown, early years settings remain open nationally to all, providing vital early education and childcare. Schools will be open too for vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

Those at university will predominantly study online, although there are a small number of exceptions including those studying medicine, healthcare and education.

Unwelcome though this latest lockdown is, and I am very conscious of the real challenges parents are facing with their children at home, we are far better placed to cope with it than we were last March. We are now better prepared to deliver online learning. This is an important step forward in supporting children to make the progress they so desperately need and we will also do what we can to help their parents. I would like to say thank you to all those parents and carers who are having to step up once more to take on the challenges of home learning.

We have set out clear, legally binding requirements for schools to provide high-quality remote education. This is mandatory for ALL state-funded schools and will be enforced by Ofsted. We expect schools to provide between three and five teaching hours a day, depending on a child's age.

If parents feel their child's school is not providing suitable remote education they should first raise their concerns with the teacher or headteacher and failing that, report the matter to Ofsted.

Ofsted will inspect schools – of any grade – where it has serious concerns about the quality of remote education being provided.

We have also been significantly stepping up the digital support we are providing to schools and parents. The fantastic Oak National Academy continues to provide video lessons for all ages across all subjects and yesterday the BBC announced it will be delivering the biggest push on education in its history, bringing 14 weeks of educational programmes and lessons to every household in the country.

Our delivery of laptops and tablets continues apace. We have purchased more than one million laptops and tablets and have already delivered over 560,000 of these to schools and local authorities, with an extra 100,000 this week alone. By the end of next week we will have delivered three quarters of a million devices.

We are also working with all the UK's leading mobile network operators, to provide free data for key educational sites. We are very grateful to EE, Three, Tesco Mobile, Smarty, Sky Mobile, Virgin Mobile, O2 and Vodafone for supporting this offer. We have also been delivering 4G routers to families who need to access the internet.

Another area where we have learned lessons is on exams. Last year, all four nations of the UK found their arrangements for awarding grades did not deliver what they needed, with the impact felt painfully by students and their parents. Although exams are the fairest way we have of assessing what a student knows, the impact of this pandemic now means that it is not possible to have these exams this year. I can confirm that GCSEs and A and AS Level exams will not go ahead this summer. This year we are going to put our trust in teachers rather than algorithms.

The department and Ofqual had already worked up a range of contingency options. While the details will need to be fine-tuned in consultation with Ofqual, the exam boards and teaching representatives, I can confirm now that I wish to use a form of teacher-assessed grades, with training and support provided to ensure these are awarded fairly and consistently.

I know students and staff have worked hard to prepare for the January exams and assessments of vocational and technical qualifications, and we want to allow schools and colleges to continue with these assessments where they judge it is right to do so. No college should feel pressured to offer these and we will ensure all students are able to progress fairly, just as we will with VTQs in the summer.

I know there is, understandably, concern about free school meals. We are going to provide extra funding to support schools to provide food parcels or meals to eligible children. Where schools cannot offer food parcels or use local solutions, we will ensure a national voucher scheme is in place so that every eligible child can access free school meals while their school remains closed.

Finally I would like to turn to our programme of testing for the virus. There has been a brilliant, concerted effort in secondary schools and colleges to deliver testing for the start of this term and none of the work done to roll this out is going to be wasted. Regular testing will take place of staff and

students in school and, in due course, help us to reopen schools as soon as possible. Testing is going to be the centre of our plans to return children back to school back to the classroom and back to college as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker, I never wanted to be in a position where we had to close schools again. I believe that schools should always have their gates open welcoming children and always being at the heart of their community. The moment that the virus permits, all our children will be back in school with their teachers and their friends. But until then, we have put in place the measures we need to make sure that they continue to progress and for this reason I commend this statement to the House.

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## [Hong Kong pro-democracy arrests:](#) [Foreign Secretary statement](#)

Press release

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab comments on the arrest of over 50 pro-democracy politicians and activists under the National Security Law in Hong Kong.



### **Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:**

The mass arrest of politicians and activists in Hong Kong is a grievous attack on Hong Kong's rights and freedoms as protected under the Joint Declaration.

These arrests demonstrate that the Hong Kong and Chinese authorities deliberately misled the world about the true purpose of the National Security Law, which is being used to crush dissent and opposing political views.

The UK will not turn our backs on the people of Hong Kong and will

continue to offer British Nationals (Overseas) the right to live and work in the UK .

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## [Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Yemen: Richard Oppenheim](#)

Press release

Mr Richard Oppenheim has been appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen in succession to Mr Michael Aron. Mr Oppenheim will take up his appointment in July 2021.



### **Curriculum vitae**

Full name: Richard Oppenheim

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Role</b>
<b>2018 to present</b>	Riyadh, Deputy Head of Mission
<b>2017 to 2018</b>	Cabinet Office, Deputy Director and Commonwealth Envoy, Commonwealth Summit Unit
<b>2017</b>	FCO, Prosperity Fund Transition Co-ordinator, Economic Diplomacy Directorate
<b>2015 to 2017</b>	Tokyo, Counsellor – Political (Security/External)
<b>2011 to 2015</b>	Tokyo, First Secretary – Climate Change and Energy
<b>2010</b>	Full-time Language Training (Japanese)
<b>2007 to 2009</b>	Baghdad, First Secretary and Head of Political Section

Dates	Role
2005 to 2007	Muscat, Second Secretary – Political, Press and Public Affairs; Baghdad Temporary duty (one month) in 2007 as Head of Crisis Management Team; Basra Temporary duty (one month) 2006 as Head of Chancery
2004 to 2005	Full-time Language Training (Arabic)
2003	New York, Committee Support Office, UK Permanent Mission to the UN
2002 to 2003	FCO, Desk Officer, EU Enlargement/Turkey/Cyprus, Europe Directorate (External)

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## [CMA to investigate NVIDIA's takeover of Arm](#)

This is an early opportunity for interested third parties to comment on the impact that the takeover could have on competition in the UK, in advance of the Competition and Market Authority's (CMA) formal investigation starting later this year.

US-based chip designer and producer NVIDIA Corporation (NVIDIA) plans to purchase the Intellectual Property Group business of UK-based Arm Limited (Arm) in a deal worth \$40 billion. Arm develops and licenses intellectual property (IP) and software tools for chip designs. The products and services supplied by the companies support a wide range of applications used by businesses and consumers across the UK, including desktop computers and mobile devices, game consoles and vehicle computer systems.

The CMA will look at the deal's possible effect on competition in the UK. The CMA is likely to consider whether, following the takeover, Arm has an incentive to withdraw, raise prices or reduce the quality of its IP licensing services to NVIDIA's rivals.

Andrea Coscelli, chief executive of the CMA, said:

"The chip technology industry is worth billions and critical to many of the products that we use most in our everyday lives. We will work closely with

other competition authorities around the world to carefully consider the impact of the deal and ensure that it doesn't ultimately result in consumers facing more expensive or lower quality products."

The CMA's remit, by law, is to assess the potential impact of a merger on competition. It cannot consider other potential effects that a merger might have, for example on employment or industrial strategy. Any national security concerns would be a matter for the UK Government, which can issue a public interest intervention notice, if appropriate.

The CMA is now inviting views on the impact of the deal on competition to assist with its ongoing assessment of the merger. Further opportunities to submit views will be provided once the CMA begins its formal Phase 1 investigation in due course.

Information relating to the CMA's investigation is available on the [NVIDIA/Arm merger inquiry case page](#).

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## **Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons on COVID-19 regulations: 6 January 2021**

Thank you very much Mr Speaker and can I share your gratitude to the House of Commons staff for all their efforts, their hard work to allow us to meet today in the way that we are.

And before I begin my statement, I know the thoughts of the whole House are with the Hon Member for Cardiff Central who is currently in hospital with Covid, and we wish her a full and speedy recovery.

With permission, I shall make a statement about the measures we are taking to defeat this new variant of Covid-19,

protecting our NHS whilst it carries out the vaccinations that will finally free us from this wretched virus.

And Mr Speaker, there is a fundamental difference between the regulations before the House today,

and the position we have faced at any previous stage,

because now we have the vaccines that are the means of our escape

and we will use every available second of the lockdown to place this invisible shield around the elderly and the vulnerable.

Already – with Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca combined –  
we have immunised over 1.1 million people in England  
and over 1.3 million in the UK.

Our NHS is following the plan drawn up by the Joint Committee on Vaccination  
and Immunisation

which is aimed at saving the most lives in the fastest possible time.

And given that the average age of Covid fatalities is over 80,

it is significant that we have already vaccinated more than 650,000 people in  
this age group,

meaning that within 2 to 3 weeks,

almost 1 in 4 of one of the most vulnerable groups will all have a  
significant degree of immunity.

By February 15th the NHS is committed to offering a vaccination to everyone  
in the top four priority groups

including older care home residents and staff

everyone over 70

all frontline NHS and care staff

and all those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

And in working towards that target there are already almost 1,000 vaccination  
centres across the country

including 595 GP-led sites with a further 180 opening later this week

and 107 hospital sites – with another 100 later this week

Next week we will also have seven vaccination centres opening in places such  
as sports stadia and exhibition centres.

Pharmacies are already working with GPs to deliver the vaccine in many areas  
of the country

and I am grateful to Brigadier Prosser who is leading the efforts of our  
armed forces in supporting this vaccine rollout.

We have already vaccinated more people in this country than in the rest of  
Europe combined

and we will give the House the maximum possible transparency about our  
acceleration of this effort

publishing daily updates online from Monday

so that job by job

Hon Members can scrutinise the progress being made every single day.

Yet as we take this giant leap towards finally overcoming this virus and reclaiming our lives,

we have to contend with the new variant

which is between 50 and 70 per cent more contagious.

The old variant, which the House agreed last month, the tiers agreed by this House last month was working with the old variant.

But, alas, this mutation

spreading with frightening ease and speed in spite of the sterling work of the British public –

has led to more cases than we have ever seen before,

alas numbers that cannot be explained away by the meteoric rise in testing.

When the Office for National Statistics reports that more than 2 per cent of the population is now infected,

and when the number of patients in hospitals in England is now 40 per cent higher than the first peak in April,

it is inescapable that the facts are changing

and we must change our response.

And so we now have no choice but to return to a national lockdown in England with similar measures being adopted by the Devolved Administrations –

so we can control this new variant until we can take the most likely victims out of its path with vaccines.

My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Health will open the debate on the full regulations shortly,

but the key point I am afraid is that we are once again instructing everyone to stay at home, everyone to stay at home

leaving only for limited reasons permitted by law,

such as to shop for essentials,

to work if people absolutely cannot work from home,

to exercise,



to seek medical assistance such as getting a Covid test,  
or to escape injury or harm, including domestic abuse.

We are advising the clinically extremely vulnerable to begin shielding again.

And because we must do everything possible to stop the spread of the disease  
we have asked schools and colleges to close their doors to all except  
vulnerable children and those of critical workers.

Mr Speaker, I don't think the House will be in any doubt about our  
determination, my determination to keep schools open,

especially primary schools –

open for as long as possible.

Because all the evidence shows that school is the best place for our  
children.

And indeed all the evidence shows that schools are safe, and that the risk  
posed to children by Coronavirus is vanishingly small.

For most children the most dangerous part of going to school, even in the  
midst of this global pandemic, remains I'm afraid crossing the road in order  
to get there.

But the data showed, and our scientific advisers agreed, that our efforts to  
contain the spread of this new variant would not be sufficient if schools  
continued to act as a potential vector for spreading the virus between  
households.

Mr Speaker, I know the whole House will join me in paying tribute to all the  
teachers, all the pupils and parents who are now making the rapid move to  
remote learning,

and we will do everything possible to support that process,

building on the 560,000 laptops and tablets provided last year

with over 50,000 delivered to schools on Monday

and more than 100,000 being delivered in total during the first week of term.

We have partnered with some of the UK's leading mobile operators to provide  
free mobile data to disadvantaged families to support access to education  
resources.

And I am very grateful to EE, Three, Tesco Mobile, Smarty, Sky Mobile, Virgin  
Mobile and Vodafone for supporting this offer.

Oak National Academy will continue to provide video lessons

and it's very good news that the BBC is launching the biggest education programme in its history, with both primary and secondary school programmes across its platforms.

We recognise it will not be possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this Summer as normal. And the Education Secretary will be making a statement shortly.

Mr Speaker, I know many people will ask whether the decision on schools could have been reached sooner,

and the answer is that we have been doing everything in our power to keep them open

because children's education is too vital, and their futures too precious, to be disrupted

until every other avenue, every other option had been closed off

and every other course of action had been taken.

That is why schools were the very last thing to close, as I have long promised they would be.

And when we begin to move out of lockdown I promise they will be the very first things to reopen.

That moment may come after the February half-term, although we should remain extremely cautious about the timetable ahead.

And as was the case last spring, our emergence from the lockdown cocoon will be not a big bang but a gradual unwrapping.

That is why the legislation this House will vote on later today runs until 31 March.

Not because we expect the full national lockdown to continue until then, but to allow a steady, controlled and evidence-led move down through the tiers on a regional basis

carefully brick-by-brick as it were breaking free of our confinement but without risking the hard-won gains that protections have given us.

The restrictions will be kept under continuous review,

with a statutory requirement to review every two weeks

and a legal obligation to remove them if they are no longer deemed necessary to limit the transmission of the virus.

And for as long as restrictions are in place we will continue to support everyone affected by them

from the continued provision of free school meals

to the £4.6 billion of additional assistance for our retail, hospitality and leisure sectors announced by my Rt Hon Friend the Chancellor yesterday.

Mr Speaker, we are in a tough final stretch

made only tougher by the new variant –

but this country will come together

and the miracle of scientific endeavour, much of it right here in the UK, has given us not only the sight of the finish line but a clear route to get there.

After the marathon of last year we are indeed now in a sprint, a race to vaccinate the vulnerable faster than the virus can reach them.

Every needle in every arm makes a difference,

As I say we are already vaccinating faster than any comparable country and that rate I hope will only increase.

But if we're going to win this race for our population we have to give our army of vaccinators the biggest head start we possibly can.

And that is why to do that we must once again stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives.

And I commend this statement to the House.