

Parent Q&A with Deputy First Minister John Swinney Transcript (16th June 2020)

Introduction

Joanna Murphy (JM): Good evening everybody, I'm just going to start now I think. I hope you can hear, we're getting a lot of messages saying people can't hear anything but that's pretty much because we weren't saying anything. I hope you can all start to hear now and if you can't it's down to you, you need to unmute your own microphone at your end on the device you're using.

I'm Joanna Murphy chair of the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and I'd like to welcome Mr Swinney and thank him and all of you for joining us this evening and giving up your evening for us. We've been running a couple of maths seminars for parents using zoom webinars, but this one is much much bigger. There are just over 4000 people online at present, so fingers crossed we don't have any technical hitches. I don't want to take up too much time, so you can find out a bit more about us on our website, but the National Parent Forum is an independent body of volunteers from across Scotland. We're all parents and we're doing our best to make sure the parent voice is heard in education particularly at this challenging time.

As a parent myself I know how hard it has been to support our children's learning since March, and I'd like to thank everyone that sent questions in advance, we've had thousands of emails with questions many of them in similar themes so unfortunately it'll be impossible to answer everyone individually in the time we have but we will give it a go to try and cover as many themes as we can. We're going to ask Mr Swinney if he can talk quickly and then we'll get through as many questions as we can. If your question isn't answered then please rest assured that it will be taken on board. We're going to compile a list of questions and comments on our website with names taken out to anonymise them and we will be sending a summary to Scottish Government and Local Authorities so that they can see all the issues and how you're feeling. We will be posting this on our website too, but just bear with us as we are a tiny team of just two people, and it may take us a couple of days to get everything up and ready.

Before we start I'd like to go over some of the housekeeping. Everybody will be muted and all cameras will be switched off, so you'll only see or hear from myself or Mr Swinney. There will be a few polls posted in the first 15 to 20 minutes of the event which I hope you will answer, this is just another opportunity for you to voice your thoughts and the first one will hopefully launch now. If you have a question or a comment then please use the chat function, I'm sure you'll all be respectful as many children are likely to be joining with us so please consider this before posting your comment. The first poll is there now so feel free to answer as you're listening. We'll try to keep on talk of the chat box as we go along and we've got some helpers from parent club but remember there are thousands of you so please keep calm if you don't get back to you right away. If we don't get to your point tonight, nothing you say in the chat will be lost we're taking a note of everything so it'll go on our website along with questions that you sent us already in advance.

Now before we start on all these questions I'd like to ask Mr Swinney if he'd like to see a few quick words.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney (DFM): *Hey thank you very much Joanna first of all thank you to the National Parent Forum for Scotland for organising this event, I have a regular dialogue with the NPFS to hear the views of parent representatives from around the 32 Local Authority areas in Scotland on a frequent basis and it is one of the key areas where I hear the voices of parents as we wrestle with the challenges that we constantly face in Scottish Education.*

I'd like to thank all the folk who have decided to participate in this event tonight, I'm really grateful to you for giving up your time to participate in the session I'll do my level best to answer all the questions that you put to me tonight and I'm grateful to you for giving your time to participate. We're obviously in a really difficult time as a country, we have all, all of us, every single one of us, has been affected by Covid and the impact that's had on our lives.

I'm a father of a 9 year old son, I've been working for home since lockdown, he's been at home, my wife's been at home, we have got to wrestle with all of the challenges that families the length and breadth of the country have got to wrestle with in terms of supporting learning for our son in an environment where life is busy and things have got to be done, and I acknowledge and recognise the enormous burden the parents have been carrying over the last few months as a consequence of the lockdown. The efforts that everybody has made to comply with lockdown have made a huge impact for the better in our country we're now seeing the spread of Coronavirus being reduced very dramatically and very significantly and that's only because people have played their part in that so for that I also thank you and your families for following the guidance that we have given about staying at home and it really has made the difference. We're now wrestling with the whole question about how do we open up formal schooling again, and of course during the month of June we have seen some formal schooling restart and in different parts of the country staff are back in their schools, and some pupils have been involved in the transition experiences, children going into P1, P7 pupils going into S1, around the country, in different forms, have been involved in that formal schooling, but fundamentally education has been delivered remotely to young people in their homes, and I think teachers have made a huge effort to try to make that possible, and it's only also made possible by the work of parents and the support of parents and carers and families.

Over the last few months I've convened along with councillor Stephen McCabe from the convention of Scottish Local Authorities an Education Recovery Group which has been meeting on a regular basis to plan how we can restart formal schooling and that will recommence in August with the schools to reopen on the 11th of August that will open up a period of what we've called 'Blended Learning' which will be a mixture of learning formally within schools and supported learning at home as part of that programme and I've been talking to lots of teachers and head teachers about how that model is being developed to make sure that young people have access to a high quality learning experience when the schools return and that's what we're all committed to trying to achieve. Now that working group that I talked about has involved representatives of the local authorities, of the

professional leadership of education in Scotland, of the professional associations, the teaching trade unions, but crucially also the National Parent Forum of Scotland and I've been grateful to Joanna for her participation in those discussions because it was vital we had the voice appearance throughout this process.

When schools return in August and things will be different. We don't want the blended learning approach to go on for any longer than it's got to go on, but it's got to happen because of the scientific advice that we currently have. Information that we have available to us just now requires us to respect the principles of physical distancing, that means we've got to have fewer pupils in schools than we would normally have which means that young people will not be in school full time, but I want to assure you at the outset of our conversation tonight that we don't want that to go on for a minute longer than it has to go on.

So, I think I'll leave it there Joanna, I'm very happy to answer all the questions that are put to me and to do that as well as succinctly as I possibly can.

Blended Learning

(Including Equity and Attainment, Inconsistency, and Online Learning)

JM: Thank you very much, I appreciate that. There are as I say lots of questions, but we've tried to group them into a cohesive flow for this evening and will try and move through swiftly as we can. Some of them are short questions with just a short answer. You mentioned blended learning, and so I just wondered if you can give us a short but clear definition of what blended learning is? That's part of the problem, is people don't seem to understand or are not hearing what it actually is and what it will mean.

DFM: *Well blended learning will be a combination of face to face teaching within school and learning that is specified from school to be undertaken at home by young people as part of their overall learning experience. So it'll be a combination of traditional face to face teaching with work that is then developed at home to reinforce that learning.*

Now, blended learning is not a new concept, it's educationally a concept that is as well developed, it's one that many educationalists at many conversations with teachers are actually revelling in the opportunity to further development blended learning because they think educationally it is a very successful approach to deliver learning, but it's different to what we are accustomed to so far, and what we need to make sure is that is delivered effectively.

Now, in some areas of the curriculum it will be easier to deliver the blended, the different aspects of subjects within schools than it will be at home. In some of the Sciences in the senior phase for example, or practical subjects in the senior phase, there will be elements of those that have to be delivered within school because of the facilities that are required but will be very significant areas where that's not necessary.

There will also be strong support for digital learning to make sure that young people when they are undertaking the learning at home are supported in the efforts that they are able to take. That's a short distillation of what blended learning is.

JM: Thanks very much we've received quite a lot of questions you can imagine about how the blended learning model fits within the overall route map that the First Minister has announced, the route map out of lockdown, and a parent Angela would like to know how different it's going to be, and if it seems that Scotland is likely to be in phase four by the time we go back into school why can't we return to full time schooling?

DFM: *Well the thing I say to Angela is that we will return to full time schooling at the earliest possible opportunity, so that's the commitment I give tonight, that we will restore full time formal schooling just as quickly as the scientific advice allows us to do that. But the scientific advice that we have says that we, we've got to observe the two metre social distancing rule within schools so we have to follow that, that's part of the advice we have about the necessity for a safe approach to the delivery of education for staff and for pupils.*

So when we follow that that and apply the implications of that that leads us to the blended learning approach. But when we get to a position where we don't have to follow that rule then obviously, we can have more young people in school than is the case or will be the case in August when the schools return. So the commitment I give to Angela is that we will return to full time formal schooling as quickly as we possibly can do.

JM: And we've got some more questions a question from Lee whose agreed with Angela, asking you know at the point in time where children can return to school we will be living in a kind of far more recognisable country: footballers will be hopefully playing in training, you know you could visit shops you can maybe go on a plane, things like that that we can't do a really at the moment. So why, again, why can't we go back to schools, why can't the children go back to school?

DFM: *It comes back to what I said in my answer to Angela's question, it comes down to the application of the two metre social, physical distancing rule, that's the that's the key fact and if that is relaxed and then clearly we can have more pupils in schools, but on the basis of what advice we have just now and what we expect to have, because we don't, in August when the schools go back we're still not going to have a vaccine for coronavirus, so there will be a certain number of rules that we have to follow as a society to deal with the fact that Coronavirus is still going to be out there, it's not going to disappear in it's entirety, it'll still be out there, and what we know about coronavirus, or are learning a lot about it, is that the more close personal interaction that is between people the more likely it is that Coronavirus spreads and we want to avoid a resurgence of Coronavirus because if we have a second wave of coronavirus in the autumn then I think the dangers for our society will be even greater than what we've gone through this spring. Because if for example we have a resurgence of coronavirus in advance of the winter, then I think we will find that the pressure of our health service and our society will be ever greater. So we have to tread with caution in how we handle this, but I do come back to my fundamental point of assurance: whenever it is safe to do so we will return to full time formal schooling.*

The other thing I should say is that we're going to review that point every three weeks, so every three weeks from now on we will undertake a review of that question, so every three weeks parents will get an answer as to whether is going to be coming to an end or it's going to be carrying on.

JM: That's great that's answered my next couple of questions so that's good, and it's good to know that that every three weeks there will be a measurement of where we are along that journey.

So we're moving on now to quite a lot of, similarly a lot of questions from parents across Scotland, and the key concern for them is consistency. Consistency between local authorities, between schools, and even between individual teachers and I'll ask you a few questions, I'll put them altogether for this.

We're going to put in another poll just now while I'm asking you these questions.

So you said you're expecting children to be in, the First Minister said, you will be expecting children to be in school for up to at least 50% of the time. So how will you ensure that the other 50% is of home learning is consistently delivered to an acceptable standard, and also how will you ensure equity for all children across Scotland when the schools return in August, there's already disparity with some schools you know two days a week, one day a week, all these different versions of what 50% is supposed to be?

And also what structures are in place for local authorities to learn from each other best practice without blame or shame?

DFM: *Okay, there is quite a lot of material in there. There will be a variety around the country because a lot of the issues about time that young people spend in school, because around the country schools have different levels of occupancy, so some schools will be sitting at capacity, some of them over capacity, and some schools will be sitting at maybe 60 to 70% capacity they oversee. The lower the occupancy level of the school the more physical space there is, the greater the ability to accommodate the number of pupils who would normally be in that school within the school estate. So, there will be the opportunity for schools to be able to accommodate more pupils and therefore to give them more time in formal schooling, so there will be that degree of variation around the country.*

Second point is that one of the points of agreement that we reached with local government in designing the an approach to education recovery was that local authorities would try to maximise the amount of formal schooling opportunity that was available for young people. We are encouraging local authorities to look at, not just their schools estate, but other accommodation that might be available whether that's other local authority accommodation, perhaps leisure facilities that are part of leisure trust, it might be local authority office accommodation that's not being used, it could be public halls, church halls, various other facilities that would be suitable to deliver education to a broader number of young people to try to expand this space that's available, because one of the key constraints and is the availability of space, another constraint is the availability of teaching staff,

because obviously if you have smaller groups of pupils spread across different facilities, you need to have teachers who can lead their education.

So that detailed work is going on school by school, local authority by local authority around the country. And what I've asked her majesty's inspector of education to do, is to review all of those plans that are coming forward from local authorities to make sure that they satisfy the terms of the agreement that we reached in the education recovery group about the need to maximise the learning opportunities for children and young people in formal face to face schooling. So that's the approach that is planned to be taken to make sure we scrutinise those plans, and obviously if necessary, we will challenge those plans if we don't believe they deliver a fair and an appropriate level of education.

The last thing I'd say is about the question of equity, because Coronavirus has affected us at a time when our entire education system has been focused on the delivery of our approach of excellence and equity of improving standards and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Undoubtedly the effective of Covid has been too to make that challenge ever greater in our pursuit of excellence and equity, and so we need to make sure that the policy interventions that we have to achieve these objectives are strengthened as a consequence of what we do to tackle the implications of coronavirus in the recovery of education.

JM: Thank you, I suppose I should just say there that one of the biggest concerns from that poll there is that over 1500 of the parents there we're seeing that they were concerned there wasn't going to be enough face to face time with the teachers. And that is a big concern that would obviously be one of the things about going to school, you can talk about blended learning all you like, it is good in some circumstances, but many people are not set up for it and it's maybe that we've been flung into perhaps rather than you know you know organising ourselves into it, and so they just need to be mindful that that's a really really big concern and most of the parents here have voiced that just there in that poll.

DFM: *And I completely understand that and accept the importance of that point and that parental feedback, which is why we've been working to maximise that amount of formal schooling that can be available to young people around the country. And the challenge we have is about those two constraints of the availability of physical space, appropriate physical space, and the availability of staff.*

Now, I've asked the General Teaching Council to discuss with and to contact teachers who are registered teachers but are not currently teaching to identify how many of them will be prepared to come back into help to supplement the delivery of education, and maybe people who recently retired but the registration is still valid, it may be a newly qualified teachers that don't have a full a permanent role, just to make sure that we've got all of these people very much in the pool to help us to achieve this objective so we can maximise the availability of formal schooling opportunities.

JM: Thanks, it's another inconsistency that parents have brought up is obviously we know about, and have brought fairly regularly over the last few days asking questions to our attention, is about other inconsistencies: inconsistencies with online learning, some schools are using live lessons, some schools aren't, some schools are banning live altogether, some

won't let you use video, they won't let you use audio. Also, is there going to be funding to help families purchase another device, or even be given a device to try and combat that digital inconsistency? Will the low income of your family, if you qualify for free school meals for example, is that going to be a way of determining who gets extra devices or another device, and Caitlin would like to know what provisions are in place for rural families with unreliable Internet access? I mean there's a lot in there as well but a lot of this, the home part of the blended learning will almost need to be online based, very much of it.

***DFM:** Not all of it needs to be online, but a lot of it will be, and there are of course opportunities to deliver really strong online learning and I'll come on to say a little bit more about that in a second.*

The first point is about the importance of making sure that individual pupils have got the equipment and the connectivity that they require, and that's a key requirement. So over the last few weeks a number of local authorities have been providing devices to young people, there are of course some local authorities that have widespread programmes of the delivery devices to all pupils, and those programmes exist in some local authority areas, and there's some other authorities who are filling in some of the gaps.

I took a decision some weeks ago when lockdown was taking place to recognise that would probably face some of these challenges, so we ordered in a very congested market I'd have to say 25,000 Chromebooks which will be delivered very shortly and will be available for pupil, and we're working with local authorities to identify just how best we can fill in some of the gaps to make sure that those that really need the devices can get most devices, and they will also have an Internet connectivity built into them so they will be the ability to use home Wi-Fi then all to the good, if it's not home Wi-Fi then they'll be Mobile broadband will be available as part of the devices as well. So we're trying to fill in those gaps that's the first part of this programme, 25,000 devices and we've got funding for more than double the charge that we've committed to already and we're working with local authorities to establish just what is the scale of the endeavour that we need to be engaged in.

Now, so that's about the equipment and the connectivity. When we then look at and the delivery of learning there's a number of pieces of work had been done, Education Scotland has done a lot of work to put material freely available to support home learning on its website under the banner Scotland Learns, and that's available for parents on a weekly basis. So, if parents are concerned about the quality and the volume of the learning that is being delivered just now, there is I suppose a backup opportunity which comes from the Education Scotland material that's available. Now when we get to the resumption of formal schooling in August and the online learning delivered through a partnership between Education Scotland and the eSgoil, which is designed to get really good lessons delivered within a school in the country but will be able to be broadcast through the eSgoil network on Glow to any pupil that wants to see that around the country. So there will be a range of, particularly in the senior phase, a range of lessons available to support to the blended learning of young people, and what we're doing with that is working across all local authority boundaries to make sure we draw together really outstanding teachers to deploy their teaching practise to a much wider audience than the maybe the 30 kids that are in a

class on any given occasion. So there will be opportunities to use digital learning to really enhance the way in which education is delivered.

JM: That's good to hear Mr Swinney, because I mean, that's what we need, we need this to be consistent across Scotland. Unfortunately over there 62% of the parents that are here this evening have said that they haven't received any digital lessons at all so far, so I believe obviously we did, we rushed out of school in the middle of March, you know with our stuff under our arms, and we didn't have time to plan for this, but that isn't that isn't going to be that same excuse going back in August. And I know teachers have been back into school I'm not blaming teachers, I'm not, but there is a real inconsistency between local authorities that needs to somehow, this Scottish Government local authority argument is used a lot for in lots, for parents, in lots of different in themes, but we need to knock our heads together for this and we need to try and work harder and work harder together.

DFM: *That's why I've have taken the approach that I've taken which is about you know, I decided on the outset that the only way we could get formal schooling back up and running in an effective fashion was if all relevant parties to that process sat around the table, a virtual table, and secured an agreement around and about that. So I brought together local authorities as equal partners because you know I don't run a single school in the country, they are all run by local authorities. I don't take decisions at local level they're all decisions taken by local authorities. So I got local authorities together with us, with the directors of education with the local authority chief executives, with parents and representatives of the teaching profession to agree a common purpose on how can we do the best in these difficult circumstances to strengthen the delivery of education for children and young people. And that's where the agreement came from to maximise the amount of face to face learning and I'm pursuing that through her majesty's inspectorate of education to make sure that Local Authorities are maximising that truly in every part of the country and that's why we're scrutinising the plans to make sure, and working with local authorities, to make sure that we take all reasonable steps to try to strengthen that and that's exactly what we'll continue to do.*

JM: Thank you. It just seems to me from where I'm sitting, or parents for whether parents are sitting, that that's not the case and I appreciate that there was agreement, but we don't have much time left of this term and moving, and I appreciate that we've got the summer Holidays to iron a lot these difficulties out, so I'm just saying on behalf of parents that we hope that this will get ironed out, that we're given the chance for the time that we've got left this term and into the summer holidays you so that when we come back on the 11th of August a lot these difficulties will be ironed out so that we're not coming into next term in the same state.

DFM: *Local Authorities are developing their plans, schools are developing their plans, you know I was on a call earlier on today with a group of head teachers in Clackmannanshire council and they were explaining their plans to me and going through well I'm working on and I've got a subsequent call with head teachers from around the country listening to their plans, so all of that has been done just know, it's obviously got to be communicated, it has got to actually engage parents first, and it should be engaging parents in schools around the country, and then it has to be shared more widely as a consequence.*

You asked about with one of the earlier points about the sharing of best practice, and again Education Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate are hosting a number of discussions to share the best practice that's been learned so that we can get to a position whereby in all areas people are exposed to the best practise that we possibly can do to make sure that this can be effective.

JM: Great, thank you. One final question in this section is all about, Donna's raised about equity and the attainment gap and there's quite a lot of information just now as well going around about independent schools who are going back to the full time structure, and I appreciate that they've got small numbers and we've been through that, but again this kind of, you know the assessment, has any assessment been made over the impact of the part time schooling for the rest of us? You know, will this not lead to this kind of two-tier education system with more able pupils or better off parents being able to have a better standard for their children?

DFM: *Well I'm trying to I'm trying to close the poverty related attainment gap, and I'm trying to support the system to deliver excellence for all children and young people, so the raising of standards and the closing of the attainment gap are the central priorities that have run through all of my actions as education secretary, they will continue to run through all my actions through the period of Covid, and the approach that we are taking is designed to try to maximise the formal learning opportunities for children and young people in all situations around the country and to avoid any growing off the attainment gap and to ensure we recruit the focus and the efforts and the resources into making sure that doesn't happen.*

Public Health

(Including Physical Distancing, Shielding, and Transport)

JM: Thank you. Moving on we could have had questions on blended learning all night as I'm sure you'll appreciate but moving on to public health which including physical distancing, shielding, and transport. I see a lot of questions are ringing round on the bottom and the chat, so bare with us because there's a lot of questions in my packs and a lot of the things you're asking will probably be answered as we go through.

So, the next topic of discussion is relating to this public health, social distancing, etcetera. We've received a huge amount of questions from parents relating to the two metre distancing rule, some parents obviously referring to the WHO recommendation of one metre, or saying will it be two metres in August, can it be reduced? But we've also had parents saying that they want reassurance that you won't be shortening the 2m distancing rule. Are you able to clarify what you think will be on the 11th of August regarding the distancing between pupils?

DFM: *Well, the guidance we have today from our clinical and scientific advisors is that the two metre social distancing requirement should remain in place to enable us to reduce the prevalence of coronavirus. Now, we could get different advice from our advisers at some stage in the future but I don't know if that will be the case because they are telling us that,*

until such time as we have either a vaccination, or we have suppressed coronavirus to such an extent that its prevalence is really not a fact in our society, which I honestly cannot see how that can happen, social distancing will be a required. Now there are different views in different countries around the use of the two metre rule and some have gone for one metre some have gone for one and a half metres, but if you look at the advice that we've had which was published the other week there from sage who advise the UK government, they were indicating just the increased risk of coronavirus infection of going for one metre rather than two metres, and it is a very signal substantial difference. So we're taking an approach which is based on the scientific and clinical advice that we have, and of course it is possible that advice might change in the future, but I can't second guess the scientists and the clinicians who are giving us that advice. But I come back to what we discussed in the earlier part of the discussion, if we were able to have, if there was a lower social distancing requirement, then it naturally follows that more pupils could be accommodated at the one time within schools, but until such time as we have that relaxation of the two metre rule, then we have to operate on the basis, that's the planning assumption we've said to the education system, you must plan on the basis of that of that requirement. Should it change in the period going forward obviously that will be reflected in the three weekly reviews I talked about earlier on, but from what I can see and what I've been advised, that will be in place in August.

JM: Lovely, thank you. Again, a lot of parents would like to know when the children are back at school what would will there be a procedure, a national procedure if COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed within the classroom, within the school, what will happen if a child or their family members have symptoms, and what kind of protocols for this class is self-isolating or if schools having to be evacuated?

DFM: *All of that advice is made available from public health Scotland and that applies in all circumstances, and schools will be expected to follow the guidance that's put in place by public health Scotland which applies to all of us.*

JM: That's good to hear, and part of this, and I should say this, a lot of the questions coming up, these are a matter of being informed from your school, but then sometimes, not at the moment, we're hearing that parents are finding they're not hearing from their schools, or are not hearing from their schools enough, and they feel that sometimes your hearing you're just not getting anything at all. There needs to be a significant amount of information shared to parents to reassure them that these protocols which are undoubtedly being put in place are actually happening and so that we can have that reassurance before we send back our children into the schools.

DFM: *There's a lot of guidance material that has been produced by the education recovery group and it's all available on the government's website, there's a weighty amount of information and guidance that's been approved and issued, and In addition to that there's the wider public health Scotland guidance which is really obligatory for everybody to follow within Scotland. That material is available and it has to be followed and obviously within schools there will be a requirement for changes to protocols and practices within schools and schools are having to vary the entrances that children use, the routes that they follow within schools, and what is the layout of classrooms all of these things are having to change to*

accommodate pupils within the constraints in which we're operating, and obviously schools will be adapting to that. Now of course it is important, and I have made this point earlier on in our discussion, it is important that parents are fully engaged with by schools, consulted about the way in which things have been done, communicated with effectively so that the parental voice is heard within schools, and that parents are able to understand and appreciate the points were put forward by schools and that's, it's you know, it's vital that that communication and dialogue takes place.

JM: Lots of parents would like clarification about things, again these things could easily be mixed up, there's differences between local authority to local authority, and parents would like some kind of national standard for a lot of points that I'm about to raise. Things like about uniform and should you wear your uniform to school, some local authorities are saying you need to boil wash the clothes you're wearing every time you go home, you know you must be wearing full uniform including Blazers etcetera, and also will children or teachers be required to wear masks in the school or on the way to school, these kind of things.

DFM: *There will be some general rules that may apply to all of us, you know the guidance on face coverings just now is that they should be worn on public transport, that they should be worn in retail situations where proximity cannot be, the two metre rule cannot be guaranteed to be been applied, and so there will be general rules that people have to follow. On the question of school uniform, I answered a question on this at the education committee on this on Friday, and I am a believer in school uniform, I said to the education committee, I much prefer school uniform days in my house to non-school uniform days because they involve much less debate and disagreement about what's appropriate to be worn. But school uniforms should be I think simple and affordable for everybody because, and I think in the context of what we're dealing with here, we have to be sensitive to making sure the approach we take and school uniform is consistent with the wider requirements that we're putting in place to make sure that we're acting consistent with the public health advice, which must be the key source of advice that we'll look at.*

JM: Thank you, and moving on to something we touched earlier on, there's lots of children who are shielding or they live with family members who are shielding, and we're hearing from a number of parents including Nicola, Tony, and Jean about this and we just wondered again for the recommendation, what are the national recommendations to everybody living in Scotland about shielding, communications about that, what measures will be put in place to keep shielding families safe when their children returned to school? And how will those families be supported if their children actually can't attend school at all?

DFM: *I think it obviously depends on what is the guidance on shielding at that moment, but whatever that guidance is, I if a child is required to shield, then the educational proposition has got to be brought to that child to support them and to support them in their education and they should in no way be disadvantaged as a consequence of that. If there is a child in a household that is shielding, the advice that we have is that it's safe for a child to attend school, but obviously there is a certain amount of care that has to be taken in the support of that child in those circumstances and oversee those types of arrangements are best sorted*

out at individual school level, so that the needs of individual children and families can be based addressed.

JM: So, there will be flexibility over that between the families and the school and if they don't, they need to communicate with their school is that what you're saying?

DFM: *There has got to be, these arrangements will work best if there is good dialogue between schools and families, and schools will know their families well and they will know the families that will be experiencing some challenge about these issues and it's important that that is reflected in the discussions that are taken forward.*

JM: And if for example a family decides that it is that they can't go back for whatever reason, they decide themselves that the child is not safe for the child to go back, would they need you know medical lines, or would they just be able to talk that through with their school?

DFM: *I think we're in a really different and difficult situation because of coronavirus, and I completely understand the anxiety that people feel about the current context, I don't in anyway question that, I understand it in its entirety. So I think although you answer the question that weekend I was asked if there would be a legal obligation of parents to take their children to school, and I said that was because the law hasn't changed in that respect but there has to be understanding of and an appreciation of the fact that we're in a very different situation because of Covid, and again that comes back to good open discussions between schools and families about the situations that individual families face, and there's got to be an understanding of those particular circumstances, which should be reflected in the decisions that schools take.*

JM: That's good to hear, thank you. I think that the National Parent Forum of Scotland is of the same mind that it's down to communication between you and your school, but sometimes we find that that communication is not as open as it could be, and we're just as a group on behalf of the parents that are here tonight, pleading with schools and local authorities to be as open and transparent as they can and be as flexible as they can. The teachers and the local authority staff are all in the same position as us at this point and it is not an us against them situation, so it's just a matter of trying to remember that we're all in this together, to coin a phrase I would rather not have used, sorry, but again we are to be sympathetic and to be kind to people and to take their circumstances into account.

The last part of this is about school transport, and how will that be managed in line in with the public health recommendations? There'll be the school transport that's organised by the school for people in the more rural places, but similarly for people in more urban locations who might have to rely on bus routes and public transport so it's just to see if you have an idea of how that's going to be able to support going back.

DFM: *There will be, well in all of these arrangements, the requirements of physical constraints will require to be applied in public transport and the hygiene measures, face coverings, all of these issues will have to be reflected in how transport is designed now obviously for dedicated school transport and some of the rural areas, the design of those*

approaches will have to be consistent with those hygiene measures as well to guarantee that is safe for young people to make those journeys.

JM: So we will again wait for information coming from our schools?

DFM: *Ultimately these arrangements, they will cover a multitude of different shapes and sizes, they will go from taxis to double Decker buses, and so local authorities and schools will have to make sure that their transport arrangements are consistent with the social distancing requirements at that time.*

JM: It would be a pity for a school, perhaps a smaller school, to have plenty of space for young people to go in but not have enough transport to get them there, and so I don't know if there is the arrangements for more transport to be laid on in some places?

DFM: *These are these are the individual judgments that will have to be made at local level to make sure that we are effective in maximising the access to education for children and young people.*

JM: And before I move on to the next part, you'll notice that there's a pattern here and a lot of this does come from local authorities through to families through their school, and so again it's back to the communication point, I know I'm labouring it, but that's, this is what's frustrating parents and it's making parents anxious, the lack of information in some places. And it is also the idea that some parents in some local authorities are being better served than them, and I'm just again urging that you keep an eye on that and do what you can.

DFM: *Well that's essentially the work that I've asked her majesty's inspectorate of education to do, to scrutinise the plans and the approaches being taken by local authorities to make sure that we can overcome any issues of equity in any parts of the country.*

Well-Being, Mental Health, and Additional Support Needs **(Including Transitions)**

JM: Thank you, and moving on to well-being, mental health, and additional support needs, we've had a lot of questions about all of these things as you can imagine, but as a parent you know your children's well-being is first and foremost. We've been told that this will be prioritised when our children return to school, and a number of parents: Zoe, Jenna, and a few others would like to know if there will be special circumstances we can apply for children too if they are struggling for any reason, will there be extra time perhaps in school if there's a bit of a bit of extra time, will you be able to have extra time for that personal social education if children are anxious, is there anything so that they don't miss lessons for that kind of thing?

DFM: *In the guidance that we've issued, we have given curricular guidance to schools and we've said that really first and foremost we have to make sure that the well-being of young people is assured when they return to school. Because if their well-being is not assured, and we're not attentive to that and supporting them then they are going to struggle to learn.*

Because young people have got to come to school feeling, safe, supported, included, and involved and I certainly don't underestimate the scale of impact this period has had, might of had, on children and young people. There'll be lots of children young people who will have experienced loss during this period. Loss of loved ones, they will have lost many social connections, some of them, sadly, may have had an much tougher time at home than they should have, they may have witnessed things at home that they should never witness, so there is a need to be assured about the well-being of children young people when they return to school to make sure that they can actually engage effectively in the learning. So that's really the starting point to make sure, that's the starting point of our curriculum guidance to schools, is that schools should be taking an approach which is about securing the well-being of young people in the light of what's been, what I recognise, has been a traumatic experience for young people.

JM: Yes it has, and as you say you've got a young child in your own house, so you see how it's affecting him like it's affecting our children. Children don't like to be kind of cooped up, and many of them are looking forward to get back to school to see their friends. Is there going to be a planned, you know, essentially planned support system for the well-being for their parents and for staff during the difficult period of returning to school?

DFM: *Schools will be best placed to know their pupils, and to know what support and assistance they require. We provide support to schools, we're going through a programme just now of appointing mental health counsellors in all schools, all secondary schools around the country and we are both putting in place resources to enable young people to be effectively supported within schools. But fundamentally the strength of our education system relies upon the relationships that are created between pupils and staff in schools that are supportive institutions and that's what we have to make sure young people have when they come back into schools.*

JM: And again, on the other side of it a lot of parents are worried about the impact of the measures such as social distancing, blended learning, on the emotional well-being of their children. How do we balance the risk of COVID-19 with the very real health and well-being risks of them not being in school? How will the children feel safe and nurtured? What's the consideration being made to the psychological impact on them? We don't want a generation of emotionally and educationally damaged children either.

DFM: *Well that's part of what we've wrestled with as a government, because we acknowledge and, let me think, it must be about a month ago if not more than that, the first minister published the framework for moving out of Lockdown, and what that acknowledged was that, yes there was a direct health harm of Covid, and that's had a terrible impact on our community, and lots of people have suffered a lot, and some have lost their lives and that's had a tragic impact on our society. So, there's that direct health harm of Covid, there's then what we described as the non-Covid health harm which is all of the healthcare treatments that have been paused because they can't proceed, and some of those will affect children young people. And then there's the economic harm of people not be able to work and to generate income within society. And then there's the social harm which affects the well-being and the educational opportunities for young people. And what we recognised was that you have to be able to address all those harms, it's not just good enough to address the*

direct Covid health harm which our health service has been reconfigured to try to address, you have got to also address these other harms as well, and that's been a particular challenge, but it's been at the heart of our decision making as to how we restart society who restart the economy.

JM: You mentioned extra counsellors etcetera, is there any scope for training extra staff, our teachers who are in school already?

DFM: *We've got various programmes around mental health first aid that are deployed and that staff are trained on. There's ventures like that on an ongoing basis on equipping staff with the capabilities and the capacity to provide the support that young people require.*

JM: Thank you, I am I'm seeing a lot of things come by about ASN having been forgotten, and it's far from forgotten, and I'm here now with a series of questions. Lots and lots of parents want to hear about children with additional support needs, they are concerned about how their children's needs will be met, how physical are will be delivered, how learning at home will be supported for them, and ultimately what will be done to ensure that pupils with additional support needs don't fall through the cracks?

DFM: *At the heart of our education policy is the commitment to get it right for every child, and there has to be no diminution when there is no diminution in government policy around that fundamental commitment to ensure that the needs of every young person are met within our society. So, what schools and put in place to support the needs of young people, we have to make sure is in place for them once the schools return, and that is an approach best served by that dialogue between family and school to make sure that the needs of children and young people are properly supported as part of the process. Now for some young people, there will be a need to ensure that the support that they're offered in school can be appropriately delivered by professionals, just given the nature of some of the interaction that may be required, but that has to be very carefully thought through and the needs of the child paramount in all decisions and discussions that take place.*

JM: I suppose a lot of parents are concerned whose children have these extra needs, because they see the fights that they have to go through, the difficulties they have to go through to get the extra support in their schools before Covid, and they're scared that any support service they have will be cut, and are scared that their children won't get the support that they need in both special schools or again in mainstream schools. So will the additional support needs children attending mainstream school, will they be given the same support as they had prior to it, or more support, and will specialist schools be able to do the same?

DFM: *There should certainly be no diminution in the support that is available to young people with additional support needs as a consequence of the Covid experience.*

Obviously during the period of lockdown that's been a challenge because our message has fundamentally been stay at home, but that's going to change when we get to August and the needs of young people have got to be properly delivered.

JM: Moving on to another need, children when we are home learning where English is not their home language, is there any extra support going to be made for them? Obviously if materials are coming home, or computer stuff is coming home, will there be extra support for them well?

DFM: *I would expect individual schools to be addressing the needs of individual pupils within their cohort and that much there's a fundamental requirement of the education system to make sure that we're properly addressing the needs of every young person, in all of the diverse range of backgrounds and experiences that they have.*

JM: So, then if it's up to local authorities for ASN children, will they be able to receive any additional funding to deliver this huge list of requirements? If there's no more funding then there won't be any change you know?

DFM: *Let me just talk about funding, because I get this put to me an awful lot, the government has given local authorities over 300 million pounds of additional funding since the start of Covid. In addition to that, we fully funded, by agreement with local authorities, the expansion of early learning and childcare to 1140 hours, which was to have started in August. Now, we said that can't happen because of Covid, it disrupted building programmes and training programme so it cannot happen. We said to local government, you can hold on to that money so local government has had 200 million pounds worth of flexibility as a consequence of early learning and childcare not been expanded. So local government has had 500 million pounds of money to be able to deal with the impact of Covid. Now, I appreciate that there are financial challenges, but there are financial challenges on the Scottish Government, and we have to recognise the scale of the financial impact that Covid has had on every aspect of public service right across the United Kingdom, which is why, you know we as a government, the Scottish Government have got very limited borrowing powers, so the type of money that we need to deal with the situation is of a level that the powers are retained by Westminster, which is why we say to Westminster 'look give us more flexibility so we can deal with the situation and address it well' but when the core point, 'are councils getting any more money?' they got 300 million pounds of new money, and they've got flexibility over 200 million pounds that they don't have to spend on expanding early learning and childcare, so you know there's quite a lot of new money circulating around the system.*

JM: Thank you, and moving on and I apologise that I can't ask all the questions and can't drill down to every finer point, to appearance on online, we've just got to keep moving on. Another question would be about parents whose children are in the key transition years and if you're expecting any change in this year's transitions, if you're expecting that children could go back for a wee bit to primary 7 or stay in nursery for longer. Will transitions move as they normally do and will there be any extra support for those children?

DFM: *As part of the education recovery group's proposals, we wanted to make sure that young people going through the transitions from early learning and childcare to P1 and those going from P7 into S1 were given transition support, and again that will take a variety of forms, I saw some news coverage just yesterday it must have been of pupils who were in schools taking part in transition activity and my friend was telling me his son was in a school*

for transition purposes as well. There's been a variety of virtual transition experiences where there's been drone fly throughs of individual schools that have been undertaken, so a whole range of different approach have been taken, but fundamentally we have to make sure, we know that transition is a challenging experience for many young people, so we've got to make sure that young people have got the support that they require.

Curriculum, Qualifications, and Examinations

(Including Gaelic Medium Education, Broad General Education, Early Learning and Childcare, and the Senior Phase)

JM: Thank you, moving on to, there's a lot of questions coming up in the chat about the senior phase, but also for the curriculum, but particularly for qualifications and examinations. We're just trying to address some questions now about the curriculum including the different stages or from early learning and childcare through to the senior phase school leavers. The first question is relating to early learning and childcare and the delay in the roll out of the 1140 hours that you mentioned earlier. Do you propose that there will be a time that we will pick it up, when we will re-commence that programme, or it is it just going to be again reviewed in the 3-week kind of period?

DFM: *Well obviously the reason why we had to delay the introduction was that there's a certain amount of building work and staff training and development that was essentially underway that would not have been complete by August. Our judgement was that we were asking local authorities to do something impossible for August, which is why we took the decision and enabled financial flexibility to be exercised over that money. We are wholly committed to the 1140 hours policy proposal, we view it as being critical to improving educational outcomes for young people and for closing the poverty related attainment gap, so we will apply a new start date to that just as soon as we possibly can do. In the period over the last few weeks we've been focused entirely on dealing with the emergency and on getting the arrangements in place to get schools restarted to deliver the learning that's being undertaken, we will look carefully at the practical issues to come to the earliest possible commencement date for 1140 hours.*

JM: Thank you. Keeping moving on, there's been a lot of mention of outdoor learning then in the new back to school, will outdoor learning be supported and adequately funded, and again using it as an opportunity to embed meaningful outdoor learning in the short and long term, but also being careful to explain to parents what outdoor learning is, and to ensure that people don't think it's just standing in the outside learning, and you know, what it actually entails so that parents again can be positive about, it rather than just thinking it's something that you've been palmed off with?

DFM: *Yeah, I'm so supportive outdoor learning, and yes, we want to see it being utilised more and more within education system. I visited a really interesting primary school in Wishaw which, some time ago, which was located in an area of densely packed housing, it had very little space around about it, and most of the space was really not suitable, or not*

originally suitable for outdoor learning. But they had a member of staff who was a passionate enthusiast for outdoor learning and saw it as a really strong means of delivering high quality education for young people and she managed to work with the whole staff, and they became essentially, in a densely populated urban area, real champions of outdoor learning. They transformed the school grounds, they secured equipment, they removed any obstacles to accessing equipment for young people, and, you know, they all have these all in one all-weather suits because you need it if you are doing outdoor learning in Scotland, and it was a really successful educational approach that had been taken, so, yes is the short answer.

JM: Thank you, we're moving on to exams, we're getting a lot of messages in the box about exams and how we have forgotten exams, obviously we haven't forgotten exams, so I'm just moving to see if I can jump through to some of these things. People are saying their child will be in school two days a week, how can you reassure them that the time will be prioritised for, you know, for exams, for learning and teaching, and not spending time, wasting time, on other things? How will our children be prepared for exams in the short time that they'll be in school?

DFM: *Well fundamentally, the young people have got to have an adequate learning and teaching experience to equip them to be able to sit an exam, so it's critical that the time in school and the time in taking forward blended learning at home and gives young people the adequate opportunity to undertake all the learning they need to enable them to undertake the exams. So that has to be planned and has to be delivered through the time in school and the time at home has got to be utilised effectively and supported to enable young people to be able to be equipped to sit an exam.*

JM: There's a lot of rumours going around, and never believe all that you hear obviously, but the rumours are going around saying that exams may be cancelled again, and so are you able to commit to letting the senior school children and the staff members know before they return to school or your during the summer Holidays whether the SQA exams will go ahead in 2021, and if not what the basis of assessment will be?

DFM: *We plan, that the 2021 exams will go ahead, that's the plan.*

JM: Okay, so then what will happen in with some of the more practical subjects, where there's a lot of effort going into coursework, like art design, design and manufacture, drama, music, where there's considerable practical aspects to consider, is there going to be any kind of arrangements made for those subjects?

DFM: *That's where I'm going to come back to my point about how time is used within individual schools, because for some of the more practical subjects it will be more critical that the time in the school is used for practical purposes to make sure that that learning can essentially be undertaken, can be assessed, to make sure that it can count towards all of the routes to certification that young people require.*

JM: *I know, there's a lot going on for the exams, but a lot of the questions coming up are about, as you would imagine, the worry, and you can appreciate the anxiety that older*

children will feel, particularly young people who have been in S4 or S5 this year, moving into S5 and S6 that have had this year almost feeling that it's a bit of a wash out for them, just at the point where they're rising to the occasion of having the exams upon them, and it's giving them the time. It's great to see that will be moving forward and that we will be having the exams, but we need to know and we need to be assured that the SQA and yourself have this in hand and the backup measures are in place so that our staff have time to be able to support our young people adequately.

DFM: *The SQA will be giving guidance to schools about the recording and capturing of the achievements and the performance of young people, but the exam, I'll just come back to the point I made a moment ago, that the exam diet is planned to go ahead, that is our assumption, as to what will happen and the learning and teaching is going to be configured to enable that to take it's course.*

JM: And again, maybe this is really a question for thought more than anything else, but given that the exam diet was cancelled this year, is there a possibility of us looking into more continuous assessment like in HNCs and HNDs moving into the future?

DFM: *I think that's a legitimate issue, and it's one that I think any education system should consider on a periodic basis, to decide what is the most appropriate way in which it undertakes, which certification and assessment is undertaken, And that's, it doesn't have to be exams, Scotland's had exams for all these years it doesn't necessarily need to always be like that, but we would have to have an open plan debate about how we go about that.*

JM: Can we agree then that that that we will have that debate? I know that you were planning to have a review into curriculum for excellence that's obviously been paused, but that should be part of that review shouldn't it?

DFM: *These issues are all part of that process that can be looked at to be satisfied that we've got the right approach to our education system. I'm perfectly open to having that discussion.*

JM: Thank you. A number of our young people in the senior phase take are doing foundation apprenticeships, and there's issues obviously some of the aspects of how that will work, you know placements within a business, is there an idea of what will happen for these young people that want to take up these fantastic opportunities?

DFM: *Well I think foundation apprenticeships have been one of the great new additions to our education system in recent years, I think they've produced fabulous outcomes for a number of young people, much much better outcomes than they ordinarily might have experienced before. So, we're working with skills development Scotland and the colleges to make sure that we've got a good proposition for foundation apprenticeships, I'll actually be having a conversation about this tomorrow, it's one of the sessions I'll be involved in tomorrow, to make sure that we do have a strong approach that will enable more young people to be able to take that route.*

JM: Thank you. Moving forward we know there'll be, early on we will be prioritising our young people's health and well-being, and literacy and numeracy will be being prioritised in

the early days of going back to school, but our children are desperate to get back to their youth clubs, to their Duke of Edinburgh, to their extra-curricular activities. Will you be able to give us an assurance that local authorities will be encouraged to work through the voluntary sector, so at least some of these activities can start as quickly as they can as is necessary?

DFM: *Yes, the whole the whole um area of youth work, if I use that term, it's been a really important element of how we've broadened the opportunities that are available for young people. So, yes I'm very keen to make sure that young people have that breadth of experience and opportunity, and of course it's leading to really good outcomes for young people as a consequence, so I I'm very keen to make sure that we start that, but it's got to be undertaken on a safe basis that's consistent with the public health advice.*

JM: Thank you, the last question in this section is, as we've heard from a number of parents whose children attend Gaelic Medium Schools, so there was just a question of what guidance has been put into the national recovery strategy for the provision of blended learning for Gaelic medium education, and how does this guidance fit with immersion elements expected of GME learning, particularly for our young people who are from a non-Gaelic speaking household?

DFM: *That last part of that question is a particular challenge, because where young people are going to Gaelic medium education, but they don't come from a Gaelic speaking household, that's a particular challenge and in this context. So I've got a group of people looking at just exactly how we can configure an approach that supports the immersion experience for young people in Gaelic Medium education, that's essentially, all of the research evidence tells you that the immersive experience is a critical aspect of the acquisition of the Gaelic language, so we're looking at how we can put in place the practical arrangements that will enable young people to be able to do that.*

JM: Just finish off, again back to practical subjects, it's just to ask if we can get reassurance that the priority won't be, moving back for older pupils as well as through the rest of the school, that it won't be just all about reading and writing. It will be about music, it'll be about cooking, it'll be about art, it will be about the things that some people might feel are less important, but they are not less important, and for that young person who, that's their gift and that's their priority, then there needs to be, the curriculum is wide white because we accept that, but at this time we need to make sure that we don't kind of funnel it down to just some of the more, you know, the more usual subjects that will make it difficult for a lot of our young people to feel included within the school?

DFM: *The curriculum, we are fortunate to have a broad curriculum, and I certainly am keen to make sure that that breadth is not in any way diminished by this experience. We've given curriculum guidance which has indicated the importance of supporting the well-being of children and young people, and also ensuring that the foundations of literacy and numeracy are properly dealt with, but obviously educators have got to make judgments about how they configure the curriculum at local level.*

Working Parents, Keyworkers, and Out of School Care **(Including Teachers as Parents, Hubs, and Parental Involvement)**

JM: Thank you. We're going to move on to a topic which is obviously going to affect very many of us as parents, and it's working parents and parent who are for key workers, including you know things like teachers who are obviously going to be back at school as well. So, we've heard from many of our working parents, from key workers, teachers who are parents, those who rely on out of school care, who are concerned about the blended learning, particularly obviously with the children being in school part time. So are you able to help my answer the following: with proposed blended learning model how are working parents meant to return to work, is their flexibility, and how are you speaking to employers to allow this flexibility to work?

DFM: *The way in which the government's route map operates is that nothing operates in isolation to other aspects of the route map. So, where we are, the route map envisages for example just know that fundamentally people should be working from home. The advice today is still stay at home. Now that's designed to give direction and clarity to so many different elements of our society, that wish to minimise the load on public transport, we've got to working from home, we should be minimising our shopping visits, and all that goes with that, and of course the schools are closed, well they were closed, of course there's now staff back in the schools. When it comes to August, yes blended learning is taking place within schools, but there will still also be constraints on other aspects of society as well. So, therefore, there is not an expectation that everybody else is back to normal but somehow the schools are not, that's not what the route map says. The route map essentially links those different elements together. Part of what my other colleagues in government do, Fiona Hyslop the Commerce secretary, is involved in dialogue with business about basically getting the business community to understand and to appreciate the need for flexibility. Now when it comes to some individuals within the workforce, they are going to be undertaking key roles where it's not practical for that to be the case, and we have made provision for those individuals through the hubs that have been in existence since lockdown started. So there will be of course some re-balancing of people because of the involvement of young people in education and other roles, but fundamentally a model of that type will be carried on to provide effective support.*

JM: Do you acknowledge though that the proposed reduced timetables will mean that parents may have to reduce their working hours or even give up their jobs entirely? We are hearing from parents who are being essentially bullied by their employers.

DFM: *I think that's wrong if that's happening amongst employers, because we are asking employers to be understanding of the fact that as a whole society we are trying to make progress against Covid, and one of the elements of that is that we have to pursue a blended learning approach within education. So, the messages from government are consistent on all of those questions to enable us to have that participation from employers.*

JM: So, can you give us some suggestions then how parents would deal with their employers who aren't being accommodating? I mean do parents have any rights to continue to be furloughed or have other help?

DFM: *Well obviously I think, you know, these issues are our best sorted out within the workplace where there can be dialogue with employers, but obviously if there are concerns that this is not happening, we can have discussions with employers to try to remedy the situation if those examples are presenting themselves.*

JM: Because we've received a range of questions highlighting those concerns that part time schooling will have a disproportionate impact on women and do you appreciate obviously that part time schooling will impact more significantly on women as they are often the primary carers of children and that this keep on the gender inequality in society?

DFM: *Clearly we want to, as I said all along, we want to minimise the amount of time that we are not in full time formal schooling, so we want to keep that to a minimum, but other aspects of society will be operating with similar constraints and similar limitations, and we have to make sure that they operate in alignment with the issues that were resting with within education as well.*

JM: Again to labour the point, we're hearing from parents that yes their employer will be flexible to let them work two days a week, but they'll only be paid for two days a week. So there are difficulties with a lot of this and we parents really need to hear that, as you mentioned your colleague Fiona Hyslop, and other members of the cabinet are dealing with this efficiently so that you can relax at least and not worry about something else.

DFM: *Yes, and I give you that assurance that work is going on across government and we are pursuing a joint agenda to make sure that the route map that we've taken operates in alignment sector by sector to make sure that these issues have been properly addressed.*

JM: Working parents include many key workers and obviously teaching staff in Scotland, and they'd like me to ask about facilities that are in place for them as key workers on the days that they're not attending school, and if there's even a plan to revisit who's afforded key worker status?

DFM: *Teachers will have key worker status.*

JM: They will?

DFM: They have.

JM: And so, but what about, there are other parents who are seeing that they are key workers and they are still struggling to get assurances that they will get childcare over the summer break, but also moving into to August?

DFM: *Well we've had key work arrangements that I think have been, generally, working pretty satisfactorily since lockdown, but obviously if there are particular issues that are*

causing concern I'm very happy to explore what they are and how we might act to remedy them.

JM: Thank you because, we're hearing that you've answered the question about teachers being recognised as key workers, but will student teachers studying in University be considered as key workers also, but I suppose that the question is will any student or any person studying at University who has children be given some reassurance?

DFM: *I would, I think, I have to tell you you're getting into very very very specific point there Joanna, and I think I need to go and have a look at that. If you want detail, I'm happy to look at that, but I don't think that student studying at University would be judged as a key worker, but I'm interested to explore the detail of what you put to me.*

JM: I don't want to suggest that people studying to be teachers are more important than people studying for other things, being lawyers or doctors, or any anything at University, so we're happy to liaise with you following this on that point.

Some of the some of the parents who have had their children in the hubs are saying that they sometimes the hubs are acting almost as childcare, which is needed and is helpful, but it's not helping the children do their lessons while they're at hubs, so key workers are often having to work their shift all day and then come back to teach their children what's required in the in the rest of the time. So will the hubs be more for learning as well as for recreation for the young people?

DFM: *I think inevitably the hubs will be a mixture of learning and experiences and fun, so I think it's difficult for me to describe exactly what is happening in individual hubs, but I think there is inevitably going to be, and there should be a blend between these different elements, within the hub arrangements.*

JM: It would be good then if parents are able to shape what's happening in their hubs, our keyworkers are doing a task that we need them to do and they shouldn't be being disadvantaged, so that it would be good if there was some kind of dialogue with the hubs moving forward and parents of the children that are within them.

DFM: *I hope you've taken from all that I have said tonight and all that I have practiced as education secretary that I am a firm believer in good parental engagement in all aspects of the design of education, it's how I've pursued my tenure in office, and I would encourage it across the board.*

JM: Thank you, again moving into private after school care, with the difficulties that people have with whoever looks after their children. Sometimes it is with private after school care or sometimes it's with grandparents etcetera, what is the position on opening out of school clubs, private after school care, and wrap around care from breakfast clubs and etcetera? Will they be available from the start of term as well, or are we are we waiting to see what happens with them?

DFM: *I would expect that to be the case, but obviously the public health guidance will have to determine exactly what happens in that respect.*

JM: As I mentioned many families rely on extended family support networks to help with childcare, and with other schools going back on the 11th of August, is there any likelihood that that will coincide with grandparents, or a relaxing of the rules, so that they will be able to help the parents, the working parents, with childcare for example?

DFM: *Obviously there is, as I have said already, there is a series of decisions that we have to take on a number of different fronts to lift the restrictions of lockdown. Some of them relate to schools, some relate to business, some relate to how we move around society, some are about our family connections, and they all have to change in a sustainable way throughout the period of relaxing lockdown. That's how we've constructed the route map to make sure there's a connection between what we do in terms of schools, with what goes on in business, or what goes on in terms of family connections. So and on Thursday the First Minister will set out the next review of the arrangements that have taken place and obviously there will more details set out at that stage about what might well be the next steps in that process.*

JM: That's great, thank you. Many parents will have to start working, now go back to work now prior to the schools going back, and so if there's no holiday clubs and things like that, and you're not a key worker, what do you think we should do? What should parents do with their children?

DFM: *Well there's obviously, I think parents have got to work, just work effectively how they can put arrangements in place to support themselves their families I accept this is not an ideal arrangement, but I can't ignore the scientific advice that I have in front of me and if I ignore that scientific advice then I really will be doing a disservice to the public. So, we've got to, families have got to work with schools, with hub providers, and all of the other arrangements to find a way to navigate through what I recognise are difficult circumstances.*

Conclusion

JM: Thank you, there's a lot, I'm trying to, I can't keep up with the chat that's going through at the bottom, and a lot of people are asking me to name and shame local authorities, particular local authorities, to go back to some of the models, and I won't do that, but we've had some answers to a lot of questions but there's still quite a lot in the air. Can you assure us Mr Swinney that you will continue to look into the many questions raised by parents that we have captured for you, and that you will work for these to be addressed with us, so that we can meet with you again and answer some of these questions so that we can relay that information out to the parents.

DFM: *You know I had a discussion with the National Parent Forum Scotland just the week past Saturday I think it was, and that's one of many opportunities I've had to listen to the voice of parent representatives from around the country, and I'll continue to do that, I'm very happy to continue to further discussions with you, and obviously having your input Joanna into the education recovery group has been very important to have that voice of parents right into the heart of that discussion, so I'm very happy to engage in further*

questions, I appreciate there's a lot of detail that people are wrestling with, there's a lot of individual circumstances.

On the delivery of the educational models, I reassure you that we are looking very closely at the contents of those models to make sure that they are doing what we've all agreed to, which is to maximise the opportunities for face to face learning and that's the critical judgement we've got to make.

JM: Thank you, I'd like to thank you for coming along and giving us your time this evening. We've had so many questions that we've gone through, we've raced through a number of them, and I'd like to address some of the critics amongst the audience who are saying that we're trying to go easy on you, or were not asking all the questions that need to be asked, there's lots and lots of questions that parents have and so you have given us your assurance that you'll help us with any further questions, and we'll come back to you, we won't send you the whole spreadsheet of all the millions of questions we've got but there are anxieties, and I come to you as a member of the education recovery group, which is a daunting task for a volunteer like me to come into it with all of these same these high powered executive directors etcetera, but I'd like you to again give us your assurance that you will also remember the voice of parents, and as a parent yourself and having your own children, that you will put them at the heart of all of this and sometimes some of the other decisions need to take a step back.

DFM: *I'm driven by the need to ensure that young people, children and young people and have a world class education in Scotland. That's my job to make sure they get that, and we've got a set of circumstances that none of us could have imagined the magnitude of them, and we're doing our level best to address those. And we're doing that with commitment and energy. I'm grateful to the support off the National Parent Forum of Scotland in articulating the voice of parents, I will always listen to that voice, I am one of those parents, to make sure that we address those issues properly and effectively within our country.*

JM: Thank you, as I said thank you very much, you'll be reassured to hear that the quite a lot of the comments are saying that I have to send you the whole spreadsheet of all the questions, so look forward to that that landing in your doorstep in the next couple of days. Again, we've run out of time and I don't know if there's anything else that you feel that you'd like to say that we haven't covered this evening?

DFM: *I think we've had a pretty comprehensive run round all of the issues Joanna, I'm grateful to people for submitting their questions, to you for posing them, and I commit myself to wider further engagement on all these questions.*

JM: Thank you, and maybe then, I don't want to put you on the spot right now before you go, but this kind of thing might be helpful again nearer the time that we go back to school, there will be more answers then and hopefully we'll have a firmer idea going forward of what we're doing and going back to school, and then it would be helpful to be able to do something like this again if you would?

DFM: *Very much so.*

JM: I'd just like to say thank you so much again to everybody for joining us, I hope you feel that it was worthwhile. Please continue to send us your questions, go on to our website, or follow our social media where we're doing our very best to represent as many voices from parents as we can. Have a good evening, have a good summer break when it comes, and keep following us over the summer, and any questions as we are going through summer holidays into the start of the new peculiarly strange term that it will be, that we will try and keep you abreast as best as we can, thank you again Mr Swinney.

DFM: *Thank you very much Joanna, thank you.*

