



Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Committee
House of Commons
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Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter of 4th May following your session with representatives of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership.

I welcome the Partnership's 'Educating the North' report and the contribution that it makes in highlighting educational performance in the North. I am determined to ensure that we have a world class education system that ensures everyone has the chance to reach their potential and live a more fulfilled life, wherever they grow up.

To achieve that I am committed to continuing to raise standards across the country. In December we announced a plan that will deliver targeted action where it is needed most, and made £800 million available to overcome these challenges at every stage of the education system. Opportunity Areas have also been set up to deliver real change for the areas of the country with the lowest social mobility – five of these are in the North.

The Government has set out a clear plan for education and skills in the North through the Northern Powerhouse Strategy and the Industrial Strategy. As well as focusing on the North, we should also recognise the complex picture of educational performance in different areas of the country when designing policy and assigning funding. This shows a marked difference in outcomes between London and the rest of the country, with other pockets of low and high performance, rather than a simple North-South divide.

I have responded to each of your points below.

Reforming Pupil Premium

Since we introduced it in 2011 the pupil premium has been incredibly important in providing resource, on top of core education funding, so that schools can focus extra support on their disadvantaged pupils. Over 32% of this funding, more than £767million last year, goes to schools in the North, which has 28% of the students in state schools, so the current system already

works to give more pupil premium funding to children in the North. Like all policies, we keep pupil premium policy under review and welcome suggestions about how its impact can be improved. We will continue to highlight the performance of disadvantaged pupils and are committed to ensuring that schools have access to the resource, evidence and effective practice that enable them to tackle the barriers to educational attainment that socio-economic disadvantage so often creates.

Northern Powerhouse Education Fund and how much has been spent

As part of the 2016 Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy, the government committed £70m to support educational improvement in the North. Since that announcement, the government has spent or committed significantly more than £70m to support educational improvement in the North. This spend includes a range of policies, some of which are additional for and only happening in the North, some of which are additional spend on existing policies in the North, and some of which represent the Northern element of some key national funds. A number of these policies are highlighted in this letter and include funding for teacher recruitment and retention, Multi Academy Trust (MAT) capacity building, maths and English teaching, school improvement and the Home Learning Environment trials.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention in the North

The quality of teaching is the single most important factor in driving up standards in our schools, and we know it is becoming increasingly challenging for schools to recruit and retain the teachers they need, not least because of intense competition for talent in a strong labour market. That is why I recently announced that my Department will be developing a recruitment and retention strategy. As part of this, we will need to understand how recruitment and retention challenges are different in different regions of the country – including in the North. We want to work very closely with teachers and the education sector to develop the strategy. This will include hearing from teachers and school leaders in the North to understand the challenges there and how the strategy should address them.

We are, however, already taking steps to support schools to address the challenges they face. For example, we are rolling out a 3-year, £30m programme of tailored support for some of the schools facing the most severe recruitment and retention problems, with around 150 schools in the North having the opportunity to benefit. For maths trainees starting an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course in September 2018, we are offering a £20,000 bursary followed by two additional early-career payments of £5,000 each, or two uplifted payments of £7,500 each if teaching in 39 specified Local Authorities (LAs). The majority of these 39 LAs are in the North. The Teachers' Student Loan Reimbursement scheme also begins in September 2018 and is being offered to eligible teachers in 25 LAs, the majority of which are also in the North. Finally, on 19 March, the department launched a pilot to extend the

reach of 'Outstanding' ITT providers into challenging areas of the country. We will support ITT providers bidding to extend their reach into the North, and other areas of the country currently not well served by ITT provision. To retain the trainees once qualified, we will help providers and schools to provide ongoing support for NQTs in the North, and in other challenging areas.

How the Government's careers strategy will benefit the North and the recommendation to measure schools on the employability and success of their pupils at age 25

The Government's careers strategy sets out a long term plan to build a world class careers system that will help young people and adults choose the career that is right for them. The strategy will give people – whatever their background or wherever they live in the country – the best possible preparation to move into a job, or training that enables to have a fulfilling life.

As part of the strategy, we're targeting support at those who need it most, by investing £5m in The Careers & Enterprise Company to help disadvantaged students get the additional support they need for the work of work, including opportunities for mentoring and guidance. We will also establish 20 new careers hubs, and fund careers leaders training for 500 schools and colleges across the country. Applications to be a careers hub recently closed and we will announce the successful hubs shortly.

The Careers & Enterprise Company is already working with all the LEPs in the North through their Enterprise Adviser network. In the North, the network has 42 Enterprise Coordinators and 806 Enterprise Advisers that are engaged with 741 schools and colleges plus a further 120 special schools and alternative provision.

I agree that it is important to measure the destinations and success of students after they leave school. My Department currently record students' destinations the following two terms after completing Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. This data is included as a headline figure in the school performance tables and helps to show how well schools and colleges are preparing young people for adult life.

As part of the careers strategy, we are considering options for improving the longer-term tracking of student outcomes. This includes tracking the extent to which young people go on to apprenticeships and other non-academic routes such as T levels. We will consider this work as it develops. I agree that my Department has a responsibility to track and measure the longer term outcomes of students from specific courses. As you know I am determined to focus on reducing workload for schools and teachers, and I am therefore wary of putting new reporting burdens on schools who already report on a wide range of data.

The contrast between the success of some MATs in London and the recent high-profile failures of some MATs in the North.

High quality multi-academy trusts can raise standards in underperforming and coasting schools, bringing fresh vision, strong leadership and clear accountability. There are many strong Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) in the North, such as Outwood Grange Academies Trust, Dixons Academies Charitable Trust and North East Learning Trust who are working in some of the most challenging areas to drive school improvement across the region and showing real results for the children in the North.

The department continually reviews and improves systems and processes to oversee academies. We have strengthened our processes for monitoring the overall performance of MATs and ensuring growth is sustainable and delivers improvement. We have also improved support available, for example, through funding professional development programmes for MAT trustees and funding Academy Ambassadors to match high calibre business leaders with trusts.

I recognise that there is a need for more high-quality MATs in the region to support school improvement, and that is why we are also taking action to support new and existing MATs to grow and develop through funded opportunities. During the 16/17 academic year we awarded trusts in the North a total of £11.1 million funding to expand their capacity and support. Additionally, we've have recently provisionally allocated a further £11.3 million in MAT Development and Improvement Funding to build trust capacity to deliver vital school improvement across the region.

This funding has been particularly successful in encouraging and helping new MATs to form; for instance a new 6 school MAT in Northumberland and a 10 school MAT in North Yorkshire that has become the sponsor for a local Ofsted "Inadequate" school.

Existing high performing MATs based in the North have also been supported to grow. WISE Academies is a prime example; initially based in Sunderland, it has sustainably built its capacity to be able to expand into a different area and improve educational outcomes. My Department has also supported the successful growth of the Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust, which now covers 8 local authority areas, some of which face significant disadvantage, and is expanding beyond the Merseyside into Wigan Local Authority

Furthermore, we want to build on the success we have seen in bringing MATs based in other RSC regions to develop hubs and deliver school improvement in areas of need. An example of this is Hope Learning Trust, a MAT that is expanding into the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area to provide a solution to 2 poor performing local secondary schools.

Degree apprenticeships

Through our apprenticeship reforms we continue to improve the quality of apprenticeships for all, putting employers in control of the funding and providing the skills that they need. Starts at higher levels are growing with 20,380 in the first two quarters, an increase of 25 per cent from 16,240 this time last year (2016/17). We have seen growth in Level 4+ Engineering &

Manufacturing, Construction & Planning, ICT, Retail & Commercial Enterprise and Business Administration & Law compared to the same period last year. There are now over 100 standards available for use at Level 4+, with many more in development. The latest data on apprenticeship starts indicates that almost a third of higher level (Level 4+) apprenticeships are within the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Humberside regions.

We have created a £10 million Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund (DADF) to support the development and take up of degree apprenticeships. £8m of the fund was allocated to Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to support the development/creation of Degree Apprenticeships, building infrastructure/expertise and increase their availability. This funding is supporting 44 projects in total, of which 16 are located in the North, and involves 34 HE and FE institutions working in collaboration. These institutions include those at the forefront of degree apprenticeship development, such as Liverpool John Moores and Sheffield Hallam universities, amongst many others.

£2m of the DADF has been allocated to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to fund various initiatives including UCAS careers fairs, increasing awareness and providing school material on apprenticeships.

Home Learning Environment

I also wanted to mention the £5m fund I recently announced to trial evidence-based home learning environment programmes in the North of England, in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation.

We know that, as well as early education and childcare, children's home learning environment (HLE) is crucial to their development. The Study of Early Education and Development impact at age 3 report showed that, aside from maternal education, the HLE is the single biggest influence on a child's vocabulary at age 3. These trials should be of real benefit to families in the North, and will show us what works in helping to improve the HLE in the North and across the country.

Government strategy for the North and the gap between attainment in the North and London since the London Challenge.

The Government has set out a clear overall strategy for the North through the Northern Powerhouse. This is our industrial strategy for the North; an ambitious vision developed by the Government in collaboration with local partners to deliver stronger growth by addressing barriers to growth and productivity across the North. A thriving northern economy—where people in cities, towns, and rural communities across the whole of the North enjoy better access to higher-paying jobs and a higher quality of life—is vital to our national economic success. That's why this Government is working with businesses and stakeholders across the whole of the North to raise productivity levels, boost economic growth and ensure no community is left behind.

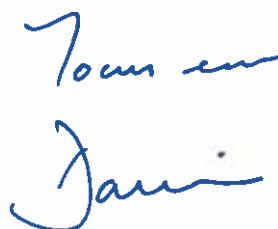
Education is of course a major part of that. In 2017, nearly 400,000 more children were in good or outstanding schools in the North compared to 2010, and between 2010 and 2017, the proportion of schools rated good or outstanding rose to 87% (up 16 percentage points).

We should also recognise that comparing educational performance across different parts of the country shows a complex picture. Whilst some parts of the North are clearly facing challenges which we need to address, there is no clear cut divide in education attainment between the North and the rest of the country. It is true that secondary school pupils in the North do perform, on average, worse than their peers in the South (with a Key Stage 4 attainment 8 score of 45.4 compared to 47.4) but they are on par with their peers in the Midlands (also at 45.4). At Key Stage 2, when London performance is excluded, the North is at about the same level as the South for pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics – both around 61%.¹

Overall, regional figures hide pockets of high and poor performance with some areas in the North achieving high KS4 attainment and some in the South with low attainment. For example, Trafford in Greater Manchester has an attainment 8 score of 55.6 compared to Portsmouth in the South East with a score of 42.3. That is why we are committed to tackling educational underperformance wherever it exists in the country.

It is worth noting that current evidence suggests that the 'London Effect' (stronger educational performance in the capital) is likely to arise from a complex interplay of factors in and outside of education, relating to demographics, schools and their workforce, as well as evidence of big city effects. The gap first started to emerge in the late 1990s and an important factor has been improved attainment at primary school, which suggests the London Challenge was not the initial driver.²

For those areas in the North that are facing challenges, the measures that I have set out above are designed to improve educational outcomes so that all pupils benefit from a world-class education that inspires them to make the most of their lives, no matter where they live or their background.



Damian Hinds
Secretary of State for Education

¹ This analysis is based on the North (North West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber government office regions (GORs)) the Midlands (East Midlands and West Midlands GORs) and the South (East of England, London, South East and South West GORs).

² (Greaves, E.; Macmillan, L; and Sibieta, L. (2014) '*Lessons from London school for attainment gaps and social mobility*', Research Report for the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission)