Military justice to be enhanced by digital overhaul

- Modern software to reduce delays, increase collaboration and identify criminal trends
- Five-year £8 million contract, with new system to be operational in early 2023
- Aligns with 16 UK police forces and the Home Office

The Service Police – comprising the Royal Air Force Police, Royal Military Police and Royal Navy Police – in partnership with the Service Prosecuting Authority and Military Court Service, have signed a five-year, £8 million agreement with NEC Software Solutions for their Connect product to deliver an integrated IT system.

This move is in addition to the Armed Forces Act, which is delivering a series of improvements to the Service Justice System (SJS), ensuring personnel have a clear, fair and effective route to justice wherever they are operating.

Configuration and deployment of the new software will commence immediately, with operational capability expected in early 2023.

The upgrade will:

- Create a single digital data source for the Service Police, Service Prosecution and Military Courts, improving information flows from the start of an investigation through to prosecution, hearing and sentencing.
- Significantly reduce workload burdens, reduce delays in data transfer and mitigate against errors, confusion, or ambiguity, adopting an 'input once and use multiple times' approach.
- Provide real-time statistical and data analytics of criminal patterns, trends, themes and identification of areas of concern, both inside and outside the military.
- Enable creation of dedicated witness and victim management processes, to further improve the standard of care and service to victims.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Leo Docherty said:

> We have one of the fairest and most stringent justice systems in the world and it's important we equip those in the Service Justice System with the latest technology and digital tools to streamline investigations and better support victims.
>
> By upgrading the IT platform throughout the military justice network, we will align better with civilian forces to collectively tackle criminal activity.

The new computer system will cover policing investigation management, Service Police intelligence, case preparation, prosecution, court management and custody.

This will create single data source, enhance electronic ways of working, enabling collaboration across not just the SJS but also alongside external policing and law enforcement agencies This will happen through secure network interfacing by providing connectivity to Home Office applications such as the Police National Computer.

Chief of Defence People, Lieutenant General Swift said:

> This is a positive step forward to a more collaborative, smoother and more compassionate justice system for our Armed Forces people, Service families and veterans around the world.
>
> Having a long-term contract for a modern digital system will also compliment the wider reforms taking place across the Service Justice System.

NEC Software Solutions Connect system is currently used by 16 UK police forces and demonstrates how policing is adapting to a digital environment, streamlining of processes and efficiencies of service. It offers future proofing for growth and development.

The new system will satisfy a significant number of the recommendations put to different elements of the SJS from recent reviews in relation to greater collaboration, improving recording accuracy and reducing delays.

The software is replacing the extant Service Police REDCAP, Coppers and Tribase Intel systems.

Background

NEC Connect manages Victim Code of Practice and Witness Charter in line with statutory guidance. It will improve witness care through a number of new ways, including:

- Adding a Victim to NEC Connect will automatically identify where they are repeat victim of crime, ensuring the officer in charge manages their safeguarding appropriately
- Overdue updates being automatically escalated to a supervisory unit
- Victim vulnerability mandated at the point of first recording
- Sensitive information held in NEC Connect can be restricted to protect the vulnerable

PM call with President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol: 14 March 2022

Press release

Prime Minister Boris Johnson spoke to President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol.

The Prime Minister spoke to President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol to congratulate him on his successful election in the Republic of Korea.

The Prime Minister said he looked forward to deepening the UK's relationship with the Republic of Korea during Yoon's Presidency and hoped negotiations would begin later this year on an enhanced trade deal.

Both leaders shared their ambition to deepen digital, industrial and military cooperation between the two countries.

Discussing the situation in Ukraine, the leaders agreed that Russia's bombardment of Ukraine was a threat to values shared by the UK and Republic of Korea, and attack on freedom and democracy everywhere.

President-elect Yoon also shared his concern at North Korea's recent missile testing, and the Prime Minister said the UK condemned the tests and would continue to push for a tough position at the UN Security Council.

Speaking about the upcoming Queen's Platinum Jubilee, President-elect Yoon conveyed his congratulations to the UK and the Queen on the remarkable milestone.

The leaders agreed to stay in close contact.

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CMA publishes environmental sustainability advice to government

- Advice suggests clarifying the law on providing environmental information to consumers – including having standard definitions for terms like 'carbon neutral'
- CMA outlines views on exemptions for environmental initiatives that restrict competition
- Sustainability Taskforce to lead CMA's continuing efforts to support the UK's transition to a low carbon economy

In July 2021, Kwasi Kwarteng, the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) wrote to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) asking it to provide advice to the government on how competition and consumer law frameworks could be enhanced to better support net zero and sustainability goals, including preparing for climate change.

Following a public consultation, the CMA has recommended a number of actions for the government to consider, including changes to consumer law which make it easier for shoppers to make sustainable choices. This could be achieved by, for example, introducing legislative definitions for potentially misleading terms like "recyclable" and "carbon neutral." Standard definitions of commonly used terminology would help shoppers to compare similar products. It would also complement the CMA's work on the Green Claims Code which helps businesses accurately communicate their green credentials to shoppers in an honest and transparent way.

At this stage, the CMA has not seen sufficient evidence that competition law prevents firms from acting sustainably. For example, it is already possible for companies to work together to lessen the environmental impact of their sector, by pooling resources or expertise, without breaching competition rules.

However, the CMA has found that more clarity about what is, and is not, legal would help firms work towards sustainability goals without worrying that they are breaking the law in the process.

For example, in its advice, the CMA has expressed a view on the ongoing international debate around the circumstances in which agreements that restrict competition can qualify for exemption under competition law. These agreements between businesses could include working together to reduce waste or improve biodiversity.

For an agreement to be exempt from competition law, the businesses' customers should receive a 'fair share' of the resulting benefits, which may typically be through lower prices or higher quality goods.

Overall, the CMA thinks that there is some flexibility under the current rules to take environmental benefits into account when considering exemptions

for agreements that restrict competition, and has committed to bringing forward more detailed guidance in this area.

To build on its advice, and further its wider objective of supporting the UK's transition to a low carbon economy, the CMA has launched a Sustainability Taskforce within the CMA. It will lead the CMA's work in this area and will bring together colleagues from across the CMA, while also drawing on outside expertise. The Taskforce will develop formal guidance, lead discussions with government, industry and partner organisations and continually review the case for legislative change, particularly in light of market developments.

Sarah Cardell, General Counsel at the CMA, said:

> We want it to be as easy as possible for businesses and, ultimately, shoppers to make choices which are better for the environment.
>
> That's why we plan to shine a light on what businesses can and can't do under current competition and consumer laws, as well as advising the government on changes that will help people shop more sustainably.
>
> Our new Taskforce will take a leading role in helping to make sure the UK's economy not only serves the interests of consumers but also delivers on its environmental responsibilities.

The CMA's advice is informed by responses to its consultation. It considered submissions from law firms, industry and consumer groups, other regulators, and members of the public. It also drew on its own markets and enforcement work in relation to electric vehicles; recent consultation and revisions to the Merger Assessment Guidelines; publications on sustainability and antitrust; and work on the Green Claims Code.

1. The BEIS Secretary of State wrote to the CMA on 19 July 2021, requesting that it provide advice by early 2022.
2. The CMA launched a call for inputs (CFI) to help inform its advice to BEIS on 29 September 2021.
3. You can read the CMA's advice in full here.
4. The information issued by the CMA should not be viewed as a substitute for legal advice or relied upon as a complete statement of the law.
5. To get in touch with the Sustainability Taskforce, please email sustainabilitytaskforce@cma.gov.uk.
6. For media queries, please contact the press office via press@cma.gov.uk or on 020 3738 6460.

New space funding paves the way for pioneering approaches to energy, communication and resources

Science and Innovation Minister George Freeman announced the £2 million boost for 13 new projects during British Science Week (11-20th March), which aims to inspire interest in and celebrate science, engineering, technology and maths for people of all ages.

The projects include Rolls-Royce developing a power station for space that could power the generation of water, breathable oxygen and fuels for solar exploration.

Another will develop new imaging technology which can withstand the high radiation levels on Mars, while a third will build a communications tool for astronauts to tackle the delay in conversations between Mars and Earth. Engineers will also develop a robot that will search for resources such as oxygen and water in Moon rocks.

Science and Innovation Minister George Freeman said:

> As we celebrate British Science Week, I am pleased to announce this £2 million package to support 13 new projects for the UK's brilliant scientists and engineers to help us take significant strides in space exploration and discovery.
>
> In addition to discovery breakthroughs, these projects will also ensure that people here on Earth benefit from new technology, including micro-reactor technology with the potential to support our Net Zero commitments.

Abi Clayton, Future Programmes Director, Rolls-Royce said:

> The support of the UK Space Agency has been instrumental in enabling the continued progress of the Rolls-Royce Micro-Reactor development programme.
>
> This shows the true value of public and private partnership as we bring together the space domain experience of the UK Space Agency with our own unique nuclear expertise. Together we can achieve ambitious technological firsts for the UK as we develop the power systems of the future.

The UK has a leading role in space exploration and invested £180 million over five years in the European Space Agency's global exploration programme in

2019.

The UK, through Airbus, is leading on the Sample Fetch Rover, which will play a key role in the joint NASA/ESA Mars Sample Return mission – the first mission aiming to bring back samples of Mars to Earth.

The UK is also supporting international efforts to return humans to the Moon, with industry expected to build parts of the Lunar Gateway – a new space station that will orbit the Moon and provide a key stepping stone for human and robotic expeditions to the lunar surface.

The Power to Explore – Rolls-Royce Space Reactor Programme

Lead: Rolls-Royce

Funding: £249,000

Rolls-Royce will continue the development of Space Reactor technology. Utilising its 60-year nuclear expertise, the British engineering firm is developing a uniquely deployable, safe, and autonomous Micro-Reactor for use in the space domain. The technology being developed is equally suited for use on Earth, supporting the government's Net Zero Strategy. The high-power Space Reactor will accelerate human exploration of the Moon, Mars and beyond, providing continuity of power for critical operations. Additionally, the technology will power the generation of water, breathable oxygen and rocket fuels from human Lunar and Martian exploration missions.

Plasma Water Purification System for In Situ Resource

Lead: University of Southampton

Funding: £100,000

One of the technical challenges in long-term crewed space missions is having safe drinking water as it is not feasible to carry all required amounts of water for the entire mission duration. The only practical option for surface expeditionary crews and future par-point outposts is in-situ resource utilisation and recycle/reuse of onboard water. However, recycled system water or extracted water from extra-terrestrial bodies can contain organic contaminants, bacteria, and viruses of known and unknown origins. In this project they will explore the feasibility of a novel non-thermal plasma water purification method to remove biological and chemical contaminants in water.

Advancing deep space communications technology to improve crew health and performance in exploration class missions

Lead: Braided Communications, Glasgow

Funding: £100,000

On future missions to Mars the crew will face some obvious hazards – for example microgravity and radiation – and some less obvious ones, including

communication delays. A radio signal takes many minutes to reach Mars so you cannot have a normal conversation with someone on Earth. Braided Communications has invented a tool to address this issue. They cannot remove the delay – that is down to a fundamental law of physics – but they can make it feel as if the delay has gone. They are working with Thymia Ltd and The UCL Centre for Space Medicine to study how this tool can help astronauts on those missions.

Moon-RISE: Moon Robotic Inspection

Lead: GMV, Harwell Space Cluster

Funding: £222,000

Water, other elements that would evaporate in sunlight and lunar materials present potential resources that can support sustainable human and robotic exploration of the Moon and the Solar System beyond. The first step is to identify and characterise resource potential of the Moon through prospecting and mapping. In the Moon-RISE project GMV are proving the concept of autonomous prospecting using a mobile robot, robot arm and instrumentation suitable for prospecting and mapping. The robot will use a combination of cameras and LIDAR for mapping during exploration and a Laser Induced Breakdown Spectrometer (LIBS) will be used to analyse mineral composition. The robot will demonstrate navigation, mapping and prospecting both on the surface and underground mines as an analogue for lunar lava tube caves that are a key subject of future exploration mission.

Augers Not Included: A new deep-drilling concept

Lead: University of Glasgow

Funding: £85,000

When exploring the surface of another planet, it may be necessary to drill into the soil. However, this has always required the use of a rotating drill string, which uses a lot of power and involves heavy rotating equipment. This project seeks to determine if a new approach, based on vibration, can be used to extract material from the bottom of the hole without rotation. This would reduce the mass of future landers, which would in turn mean that they could be deployed more quickly and more cheaply than before.

Dynamic Radioisotope Power Conversion Technology Feasibility Study for Lunar Surface Applications

Lead: University of Leicester

Funding: £50,000

This project will focus on developing a dynamic radioisotope power conversion concept design that uses the standard baseline European Large Heat Source (a 200 W radioisotope heat source). Adopting a system engineering approach, the design will be backed up by analytical models and will be a building block

for further Leicester led work. The ELHS could be the heat source for a much larger set radioisotope power generators both within and outside Europe, thus transforming access to challenging regions in the solar system, enabling a host of new mission types and opening bilateral and multilateral collaboration opportunities.

Radiation characterisation of infrared detectors for future Mars exploration

Lead: Open University

Funding: £91,000

The Open University (OU) is investigating the suitability of a new UK-based imaging technology for use in future Mars exploration missions. Researchers at the OU are subjecting newly developed infrared detectors, provided by Teledyne e2v based in Chelmsford, to radiation levels like those experienced during a mission to Mars. By investigating how well the detectors cope with the damage caused by radiation, this exciting new technology may provide a new avenue for remote observations of Mars in the infrared band and commercial applications in the UK technology market.

Development of a Deeply Throttleable Pintle Injector for Lander Applications

Lead: Protolaunch, Westcott

Funding: £194,000

This project will further advance Protolaunch’s deeply throttleable pintle injector technology, with a particular focus on lander applications.

Protolaunch is a chemical propulsion start-up company developing engines for NewSpace applications that are throttleable, reliable, and don’t need a turbopump.

This project builds upon previous hot-fire engine tests and will be one of the first test campaigns to take place at the newly opened and state-of-the-art Protolaunch Propulsion Test Facility situated at Westcott Venture Park in Buckinghamshire. The project is well-aligned with Protolaunch’s technology roadmap as the company rapidly advances the technology readiness of engine sub-systems as they bring their family of propulsion system products to market.

Developing In Situ Resource Utilisation Production Technology (DISRUPT)

Lead: TAS-UK

Funding: £ 218,000

This project will establish an end-to-end demonstration capability in the UK

which would contribute significantly to the de-risking of technology used for In Situ Resource Utilisation (ISRU). This end-to-end demonstration capability would allow many of the uncertainties present in the process chain to be understood and characterised; especially the effect of the regolith (Moon soil) collection and pre-processing of the feedstock for the Metalysis-FFC process reactor. This activity will be conducted in partnership with Metalysis, AVS, URA Thrusters and the Open University.

Microwave Heating Demonstrator (MHD) payload –Develop hardware of 250W Microwave Generator and oxygen/water extraction subsystem

Lead: Open University

Funding: £174,000

This project will work on a Microwave Heating Demonstrator (MHD) payload concept which has been developed to investigate the potential of the microwave heating method for lunar construction and resource extraction such as oxygen and water from lunar soil through a series of experiments on the Moon surface.

NEBULASS –Nuclear Energy research at Bangor University and Leicester for Advanced Space Systems

Lead: Bangor University

Funding: £50,000

Nuclear reactors for space will require extremely robust fuels and to enable efficient launch and operation. Properties such as density and mass are far more important than for terrestrial nuclear applications. The work being led by Bangor University’s Nuclear Futures Institute (https://nubu.nu) is aiming to model the behaviour and operation of a range of space reactor concepts and tailor the fuels to be fit for purpose, enabling specific missions to the Moon, Mars and beyond. A combination of theoretical modelling and practical fuel manufacture capabilities are being targeted and extended with the help of the collaborating team at the University of Leicester, providing a new nuclear power capability for the UK Space Agency.

LEIA Hybrid Qualification

Lead: MDA UK, Harwell Space Cluster

Funding: £421,000

This grant will support the qualification of the company’s LEIA LIDAR, which is used to provide a 3D map for spacecraft landing on the Moon and well as spacecraft rendezvous and docking in LEO and GEO. LEIA has been designed specifically to meet the needs of the emerging commercial space market and will be a key component for a new generation of companies providing payload delivery services to the Moon over the next few years. At the end of the project LEIA will have undergone a suite of environmental and functional

tests design to raise the technology readiness level and test the unit in the field to optimise and improve performance.

An architectural feasibility study for the Curation and Analysis Facility for Extra-terrestrial Samples.

Lead: Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), part of UK Research and Innovation

Funding: £40,000

An architectural feasibility study will develop the construction process for the UK's first bespoke, dedicated facility for the preparation, characterisation and analysis of pristine extraterrestrial samples. There are at least eight missions planning to return samples from asteroids and Mars over the coming decade. These missions will move planetary science from analysis by space instrumentation to analysis using more sophisticated techniques on Earth.

Amanda Spielman's speech at the 2022 ASCL Annual Conference

Good morning and thank you for welcoming me to your conference.

I was going to start by saying how happy I was to be with you in person, but unfortunately it's been my week to catch COVID. I hope I'll have better luck next year, if you'll have me back. For now, you get me on Zoom – how very 2021!

But lifting COVID rules does mean you have to a lot less to navigate in the shifting sands of restrictions, regulations and guidelines, as you have done over the last 2 years. I do hope we are now free of the COVID restriction cycle, if not free of COVID itself!

As leaders, your challenges have certainly not vanished, but they are evolving. Restoring confidence, reducing anxiety, and re-establishing standards. These are among the new challenges for schools and colleges.

I'm sure that you're already rising to meet them, as you have everything that the pandemic has thrown your way so far. Thank you, as ever, for the determination and talent you and your staff show every day.

As we move into the spring, confidence is going to be key. For you and your colleagues, there are decisions to be made about how best to bridge the gaps in pupils' learning; and how to manage this cohort of children through the rest of their education, so their disrupted schooling doesn't hold back their

progress and attainment.

But there is also the need to restore confidence outside the school gates. There are still parents who are hesitating about their children returning to school. We know that attendance is a stubborn problem in some quarters. It's rightly a priority for government – and I know you will also feel it keenly. Particularly because persistent absence is often a bigger issue for the very children who most need the structure and support of school.

Our recent report on 'Securing good attendance and tackling persistent absence' looked at what we were seeing on inspection. It considered some of the root causes of absence – as well as how you've been getting a grip on the problem.

Many of our findings weren't surprising. The causes of persistent absence now are often no different to pre-pandemic – but they have been exacerbated.

Children whose parents are struggling financially, or with domestic violence or substance abuse, have always been prone to absenteeism – and often this is about their parents' attitudes and actions, rather than their own. We know these problems grew through the pandemic, so unsurprisingly, we're now seeing more children failing to make a consistent return to the classroom.

And there are others whose anxiety has grown through a period when they have missed social contact. Some may have come to believe they are better off away from their peers – learning remotely in the privacy of their bedrooms – and in some instances this skewed perception may have been reinforced by their parents.

Some parents have health concerns for themselves or family members and wait in hope for a highly unlikely zero-COVID future. Others, having seen that remote education is possible, have a more relaxed attitude to absence, whether long-term or to enable family holidays in term time. They have seen that other people's children are away from school and so expect the same latitude.

Families whose children have special educational needs struggled more than most, when regular support services were curtailed. Some of those children found comfort in learning at home, going at their own pace. So it's understandable that some parents are reluctant now to let that go. It's an absolute priority that SEND services support children to take part fully in school life.

And I think to some degree, the disruption we've seen over the last 2 years, has fractured the social contract around education. For years that contract has been clear – parents have a responsibility to get their children to school, with minimum absences, and in return schools do their level best to educate and look after those children.

Now's the time to remake that contract. Our research did find that schools with strong, proven attendance strategies before the pandemic were, unsurprisingly, proving adept at managing absence through COVID turbulence.

They listen to families and children, understand and empathise – but are still consistent in their expectations. That approach helps tackle absenteeism and I hope it will also halt the increase we've seen in withdrawals.

Because I am concerned by the recent increase in the number of children being home educated. There will always be parents who do a fantastic job educating their children at home. But it remains the case that we take a very liberal attitude to home education in this country, compared to many other nations.

We need to recognise that home education is very hard. Most parents aren't equipped to do it and if they are motivated by their own or their child's anxiety, rather than a deeply-held desire to home-educate – the outcomes for their child are unlikely to be great.

And we should also remember that sadly a small number of parents have darker motivations for taking their children away from their teacher's sight.

It's tragic that Arthur Labinjo-Hughes never returned to school after lockdown. He was supposedly being educated at home.

So, I'm very pleased at the recent announcement by the government that it will be starting a register for home-educated children – so we know who they are, where they are, and who is taking responsibility for their education. We have been calling for this for a long time. We all know that no single piece of legislation can prevent tragedy, but this does feel like an important foundation.

There is always a tension, when talking about school attendance, between the statutory and the discretionary; between children being in school because they have to be there and children really doing their best to learn. Teachers often talk about their desire to inspire the next generation, which is admirable – teaching is a profession best served by motivated people, enjoying what they do. And of course enthusiasm is infectious.

But enthusiasm and motivation need to be channelled in the right way. I'm sure you are all constantly thinking about the way your school and your subject leads construct and teach the curriculum. A curriculum that will engage your pupils, build their knowledge and develop their skills, and in doing so, leave them with that love of learning.

That's the goal. And it was the starting point for our inspection framework. Getting to the heart of what education is about seems to me to be the right philosophy for an education inspectorate. Pedagogy is incredibly important, and without good teaching, children's learning is seriously hampered. But the curriculum is the substance – the rock on which good teaching is built. So that's where we focus our attention on inspection.

And here I must say – I am so pleased that we are back out inspecting. That's not a line I deliver in hope of a warm round of applause! But I absolutely mean it.

There are many reasons why I believe that inspection is fit for these times:

safeguarding – of course; keeping parents informed – obviously; informing intervention decisions – that's important; and assessing the education received by this generation, which has dealt with so much – that's vital.

But there's something else as well. When we began this framework, I spoke repeatedly about the power of professional conversations between school leaders and inspectors. Discussing the curriculum is a great way to marshal arguments and test your approach. We describe ourselves as a force for improvement – and that can often be framed in terms of our judgements and responses to them. But there is something more fundamental at the core of inspection: that professional dialogue.

And that's true now more than ever. COVID has not had a single impact on education; it's affected schools and pupils in many different ways. A less flexible system of inspection that relied more heavily on data and test scores, would struggle to adapt to the reality that we've all been living through.

Bridging learning gaps; your curriculum has had to be adjusted to fit your student's needs; the way you manage your schools is often different to pre-pandemic times; and many of the metrics that might have been obvious measures of success a couple of years ago, are either not available right now, or aren't enough by themselves to judge a school in the current climate.

I've said it before, but it's worth repeating, as clearly as I can: our inspections are about substance, not about compliance. Your theme at this conference fits so well here. We are looking for ambitious leadership, not schooling-by-numbers.

And while I'm warming to this theme, let me add that I have always been acutely aware of the workload and well-being of teachers and leaders. And that has been thrown into sharp relief by the pandemic.

So please, don't overload your teams with preparatory work "for Ofsted". Just don't do it.

And don't run 'mocksteds'. They are a waste of precious time.

Ambitious leadership is surely about substance and integrity. It's about doing the right thing for children and learners. If you do that, we'll see that. You really don't need to do anything extra on our account.

I believe much of the strength in the inspection framework lies in the conversations that we have with you. Understanding the adjustments you have had to make; appreciating the context in different schools; dealing in nuance, not in absolutes.

And here I must give credit to ASCL. Our dealings with you throughout the pandemic have been constructive and considered. You didn't call for knee-jerk changes to the way we inspect, or the framework we use.

Instead you've recognised that stability in rocky times is a good thing – and that doesn't just apply to your pupils. So we've not moved the goalposts on

the way we inspect; the framework stays the same. But we have done our best to put fair play at the heart of the game.

So we extended the transition arrangements to recognise that curriculum thinking takes time, particularly when the aim is so important. Working out how to bring pupils up to speed after 2 disrupted years shouldn't be rushed.

And fairness also means recognising when a school is facing overwhelming difficulties – and the inspection should be put on hold. We rebalanced our deferral policy to take proper account of COVID impact. And we have been taking great care to assess every deferral request on its merits.

In the first half of this term, the great majority of deferral requests were agreed.

And it's also worth saying that getting on for three quarters of schools didn't want a deferral at all – despite us explicitly asking if they needed one.

It simply wasn't the case that schools in general didn't want, or couldn't cope with their inspection. Some did want time to focus on their immediate challenges – but most chose to go ahead.

So we think we are meeting schools where they are and we're showing flexibility in the timing of inspections and in the way inspectors take current challenges into account.

And since restarting inspections we've seen the grade profile across schools stay pretty consistent with the pre-pandemic profile. Many schools have improved and they've been recognised for doing so. Despite some anxiety around the outstanding grade – and it's rightly a high bar – schools are retaining it and new schools are reaching it.

Which is as it should be.

I hope that gives you confidence that we are doing our best to work with schools and colleges – we never want to work against you. We do understand what you're going through and we do appreciate the pressures.

But this cohort of children has had their education disrupted in a way that hasn't been seen since the second world war. We should be giving them the best possible experience now. That falls to you, more than anyone, of course – but there is a part we have to play as well.

And it's probably worth adding an aside here for those of you who run, or work in MATs. We have just restarted our MAT summary evaluations and I want to explain our thinking. We're doing a small number of evaluations to fine tune our understanding of this very diverse sector – in which trusts come in very different shapes and sizes. We want to share effective practice and really tell the story of what's happening in the academy system as it grows and changes.

What we're not doing is grading or judging MATs, or trying to impose a model

for the way trusts should work. We want to understand more about the full spectrum of trusts and what they bring to education. So if we come to your trust, that's what we have in mind.

I've talked about building confidence to support attendance. But building confidence is a theme that runs throughout your work right now.

After 2 years without external exams, there is an understandable lack of confidence among pupils and, I'm sure, teachers too, about what is likely to happen this year. I've heard the very positive messages from government that exams will go ahead and I'm pleased about that. They provide focus and motivation for learning and study; they give young people the chance to show what they have learned; and of course, they open the door to the next level of education and the world of work.

You're making the decisions about how best to get your pupils to where they need to be. For children approaching exams, decisions have already been made about what will and won't be tested. But clearly adjustments are having to be made in all year groups – nobody can reasonably expect children to cover all the ground that was lost, at breakneck speed. Cramming doesn't lead to long-term learning, so you will be making the content and sequencing decisions about what must stay in the curriculum and where it can be abridged.

We've been publishing curriculum research reviews drawing on research evidence to lay out the principles of good curriculum in each subject. Many of the reports are already on our website, with more to follow in the next few months. I think they've already been viewed around 400,000 times so far.

For most children, I'm confident that good curriculum decisions, combined with good teaching and the daily structure of school will be enough to bring them up to where they need to be. I've regularly made the point that when it comes to catch up, most children will get what they need in their usual classrooms with their usual teachers. That will leave space for the more targeted interventions – whether it's tutoring or other supplementary effort – for those who need some extra help.

Which may well include children with SEND. But it would be a shame if a laudable desire to help these children led to us thinking about them as an entirely separate group. Of course, children with the most complex needs, need specialist support, but many children with SEND are best served by as normal a school experience as possible – with the same high-quality curriculum and great teaching as their classmates, plus a little extra help where they need it.

As we look forward to the SEND Green Paper, I hope that good education is very clearly affirmed as the keystone that supports a reformed system.

I firmly believe that reducing anxiety and rebuilding confidence will be a theme for the rest of this school year. As we all watch the terrible scenes unfolding in Ukraine, it's a stark reminder that COVID has no monopoly on creating fear and concern. I would echo the comments from the Secretary of State yesterday and by your general secretary just now, about the terrible

impact of the Russian invasion on the lives of all Ukrainians. And of course, particularly on the children – who suffer so much and whose future is so uncertain.

And as we saw earlier in the pandemic, children here know what's going on in the world; they absorb information – not all of it accurate – and they also share their concerns with their friends. Once again you will need to help them understand world events that are outside their control, while minimising their anxieties. It is sadly something that you are well-practiced at doing.

We mustn't forget that the school day is an incredible force for good. There is rightly a huge emphasis on the mental health of our children and the long-term impact of the last 2 years.

Some children will undoubtedly need specialist support to recover their balance. But wellbeing – in the main – is an outcome, not a standalone activity. It flows from normality and certainty, and the reassurance to be found in good education and the wider school experience.

So it's so heartening to see the return of activities like sport, drama and music. To see children having the chance to go on trips and visits. These are often characterised as extra-curricular, but that really understates their importance as a fundamental part of school life. And they represent a return towards normality and away from limitation; towards confidence and away from anxiety.

As I travel around, I meet a lot of teachers and leaders – and it's always a pleasure! I know how much you are looking forward to leaving COVID management behind. I absolutely recognise that there are mixed views about the relaxation of restrictions in schools, but they point to a future where the emphasis is not on managing absences and isolation, but on doing the work that you trained for and love.

You are still grappling with a lot – and I will never play down the pressure that you and your staff are under. But I really want to believe that we are in the endgame now. I do hope that soon, you will be able to concentrate, without distraction, on what you do best. I know that's what you want, and it's definitely in the best interests of the children and young people you teach, support and watch over.

My thanks, as always, go to you and the staff you lead. I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.