

# [Amanda Spielman at the Nursery World business summit 2022](#)

Good afternoon. It's lovely to be here. Nothing beats meeting people in person, so thank you for inviting me back.

I last spoke at this event five years ago, in my first year as chief inspector. I think I remember talking to you about Ofsted's new strategy. Five years on, we're updating the strategy and I'll talk a little about that later on.

But first, I also want to reflect on the last two years, how the pandemic has affected your sector, and also to talk about the work we've done on education recovery so far. We all know that a child's early education has a lasting impact – so education recovery really does start here with you.

## **Impact of COVID-19 on providers**

But before that, I'll start by thanking you – and your staff – for everything you have done and continue to do for children.

To say that the last couple of years have been challenging is just such an understatement. Restrictions, furlough, funding, constant rule changes. And that's before we even start to talk about staff well-being, staff retention and, most important of all, the impact on children themselves. None of us yet knows how much longer-term impact there may be.

Like yours, our work continued throughout the pandemic, and it highlighted how you were responding to the challenges. And it gave all of us a better understanding of the impact on children.

My most recent [Annual Report](#) described some of the difficulties you have been having. We know that maintaining ratios has been tough when staff have been ill or isolating, and that the quality and availability of temporary staff has varied.

We know that it has changed how many families manage their time and use childcare. Even after restrictions have been lifted, more flexible working or working from home means that many parents are at home more and perhaps looking to make less use of nurseries or childminders. So you have had to adjust your operating models. That makes planning just that bit more difficult.

Some of you have fewer children on roll and are worried about long-term financial sustainability. And that increasing flexibility for parents can also translate into a loosening those routines for children, which can make it harder to settle them back into nursery on the days they're with you. All these things really don't make life easy for you.

But I am pleased to say that, despite all the difficulties you have faced and continue to face, it is very clear from our recent inspection evidence that you are maintaining the quality of children's education and care. That's really down to the skill, adaptability and expertise of you and your staff.

I do know that at times, you feel overlooked and undervalued, and unrecognised for the work you do. It's absolutely fair to say that early years doesn't get the attention you'd expect given the size of the sector and the importance of your work.

And I do think for the wider world, the sector itself can appear quite confusing. Whereas a school is a school, has a building that is easily recognisable and most of us went to at least one, early years provision isn't so uniform.

Childminders, nurseries, pre-schools, kindergartens, nannies, holiday clubs, creches, the list goes on. Your settings vary enormously and, unlike schools, you're serving the needs of both parents and children.

We all know that the [EYFS](#), now in its 15th year, is the statutory umbrella for all of this. But the list shows how varied early years provision really is. And of course, almost all children finish their early years in school Reception classes.

So the developmental and education needs of your children range all the way from babies, who have yet to learn to roll over, all the way to children on the cusp of formal education. It makes it an incredibly vital, diverse and complex sector, worthy of the closest attention from policymakers.

And there have been many different initiatives to support and encourage parents to use childcare over the years, but clearly we have yet to find a perfect solution. I know that some of you here today run organisations with multiple settings, and sometimes are dealing with inspectorates and regulations in more than one country. Your insights are invaluable to the government's plans for the future of childcare. And in shaping our relationship with you as we do our work as regulator and inspector.

## **The education inspection framework (EIF)**

When I last spoke at this conference, we were in the early stages of developing [the current inspection framework, or the EIF](#). We took some time to develop this framework, drawing on the best research we can find out there, to make sure that our inspectors were looking at what matters most.

Throughout education – from early years all the way through to further education – we now emphasise the curriculum: what we want children and learners to know and be able to do at different stages in their life.

That is every bit as true for our youngest children, and I will come back to curriculum in a moment. But, on the whole, the feedback we receive from our EIF inspections of early years settings is very positive.

Given the COVID-19 disruption, we couldn't have introduced the EIF at a better time. The education conversation about what we want children to learn and whether they are gaining the right knowledge and skills has never been more important. It sits at the heart of our framework. The pandemic context, and what you've been having to do differently as a result, is an important part of that conversation which of course starts from the moment the inspector makes that phone call.

This year, we are evaluating how well the framework is going, as well as developing our strategy for the next 5 years.

## **The revised EYFS**

Alongside our new framework, the DfE [Department for Education] made revisions to the EYFS. And these revisions came into force last September.

Reading the new document, I was really pleased to see more precision in the early learning goals. I like the fact that it makes it clear that those goals are an assessment point at the end of the stage and the EYFS separates this from the curriculum – those 'educational programmes'.

This is a good thing. For too long, children have been assessed and measured against the early learning goals from the moment they start. And that doesn't make a great deal of sense. It's a bit like assessing children at the start of a GCSE course based on what they will have learned by the end, before any of the content has been taught.

And over the years, assessment has become a bit of an industry in itself, making a heavy workload for staff and often taking time and attention away from the interplay between practitioners and children, which is so crucial.

The new EYFS specifically says:

When forming a judgement about whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, teachers should draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement. ... Sources of written or photographic evidence are not required, and teachers are not required to record evidence.

I'm repeating that message to give you and your practitioners confidence that Ofsted inspectors are not looking for files full of assessment evidence on individual children. You don't need to photograph a child with a group of 5 bricks to prove that you have introduced children to the number 5. If the practitioner has been working with the child, they will know whether the child can recognise 5, can count up to 5, can build a tower of 5, or not.

A photograph doesn't give the practitioner this information: they already know it, and it could give false assurance that the child understands something that is in fact beyond their knowledge. We can all fall victim to what looks good, through photographs of lovely children caught in the moment,

without knowing whether the knowledge and skills underneath are secure. I'm sure parents love the photos – I'm not saying don't take them – but please, don't take them for us!

## **The impact of COVID-19 on children**

And I think that our knowledge of what children can do and what they need to learn next is even more important now, given their very different experiences over the last 2 years.

It is a stark thought that children turning 2 now have spent their entire life in the context of a pandemic. Their first years have been considerably different from what we have previously expected a 'normal' early childhood to look like. Many children have only socialised with close family and, often, any other adults they've met will have been wearing masks.

In the [research we published last December about pandemic impact](#), we did report on how many children are behind where would have been expected pre-pandemic.

I'm particularly concerned about the increased delays in vocabulary acquisition and communication skills. And linked to this, children's social skills are not as strong. Many children seem to be suffering more separation anxiety – and first-time parents especially seem to be more anxious about leaving their child. And you told us that many of the children take longer to settle or are shyer with unfamiliar people.

And early indications from our most recent research is that you are continuing still to find gaps in children's communication and language development and PSED – especially in those independent skills. And your efforts to teach these and close these gaps is sometimes hampered by staffing levels still being in flux and some staff not yet having enough training.

Fortunately, you also told us that many of the social difficulties have proved to be short-lived. That once you got children back into consistent routines, they've quickly grown in confidence and become more comfortable with familiar adults and other children. This, I hope, suggests that there isn't a long-term negative impact on children's social development.

Overall, I think there is hope that there will be little, or only very limited, long-term impact on our youngest children.

## **Communication and language**

In tackling the impact of the pandemic on the delay in children's speech and language acquisition, it is heartening to know from recent inspections that many of you have really redoubled your efforts to give children the opportunity to talk. We saw a nice example of this in a nursery that had re-introduced group snack-time, and was really using it to encourage children to listen to each other and take turns in conversation.

On every inspection, inspectors talk to you about what you're doing to make

sure that children learn, remember and use more words. And the reason for this is simple: a good vocabulary sets a child up for life.

Knowing and using more words brings confidence and assuredness. Children can communicate well, articulate what they're thinking, get what they want. At the simplest level, it helps them to make friends and fit in socially. It's good for their self-esteem and mental health.

And it's now well accepted that the number of words young children have does correlate with how well they go on to do at school, as well as their success in adulthood. Children with poor language and communication when they get to school are less likely to do well in tests at 11; it leaves children with a lot of ground to make up.

So the more words a child has heard, knows and uses by the time he or she start school, the better. What will this mean for you? Well, of course you can make sure that children have lots of activities that build and develop their vocabularies. And that all children benefit from those activities, not just the bold ones who put themselves forward.

These are the things that you and your staff do well, day in, day out. Listening and talking to children, introducing new words, encouraging them to use them, rewarding curiosity about language. Reading then comes more easily when children start school.

But while vocabulary can be picked up through activities and everyday conversation, there will always be some words that just need to be taught explicitly. So please, don't be afraid to teach where you think a child needs to be taught. And this is especially relevant for those children who arrive with fewer words.

## **The power of reading**

I do often talk about the importance of reading aloud when talking to an early years audience, and today is no exception. So, forgive me for banging the drum once again. Reading really is one of the best things we can do to help children increase their vocabulary. Stories, rhymes and songs all help children learn new words that aren't always going to come through everyday conversations.

Maurice Sendak's Wild Things 'roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth'. That's a great line to read aloud – and it's a fun line to hear.

Listening to a well-read story is a joy most of us will remember from childhood. It's sensory; it's exciting. It helps to give children a love of stories and reading, as well as some much-wanted attention.

About a quarter of 5-year-olds still start primary school without the language and communication skills expected for their age. You and all of your staff are in the best position to help those children, especially the ones that aren't lucky enough to get that exposure to English words at home.

## **Physical development**

Another area of concern exacerbated by the pandemic is the lack of physical activity. Obesity data for 5-year-olds shows that far more children are now overweight than before the pandemic. So the work you do to help children lead fit and healthy lives is really important.

Inspection evidence tells us that you have adapted outdoor play areas, taught children to use a greater variety of play equipment outside, such as larger slides, more climbing equipment, bikes, and sand and water play areas. You are helping children to be more active, so they get their heart rates going, building core strength and agility. Some of you, especially in deprived areas, are putting more of your money into this, because you have recognised that some children will have limited opportunity to get physically active elsewhere.

Many of you have invested heavily in making sure that children eat well. Working as a nursery chef is an important role. It takes a lot of knowledge about young children's dietary requirements, as well as being able to tempt them to eat what is good for them through creative cooking.

There is no doubt that giving children a nutritious, well-balanced diet is really important. Inspectors are frequently told by parents that children are introduced to new tastes in nursery and have a better diet because of this. You know the importance of feeding young bodies at the same time as feeding young minds.

## **The role of play**

Finally, I'd like to talk a bit about some of the misunderstandings out there about Ofsted inspections and play.

Over the years, Ofsted has often been accused of wanting to limit the time that children spend playing in their early years. And I want to say quite unequivocally that this isn't the case. Play is important. Play is fun. All children must have time to play, on their own and together. There are so many ways that play helps young children's development.

There is a wide spectrum of play. Some is completely unguided, and some is more guided, to support particular learning. Children often can't differentiate between what is play and what is learning – but they don't have to; that is the job of your staff. To children, most of what they do in nursery is play. It is the adult's task to identify what a child needs to learn and how to make sure they do learn it, either explicitly, such as teaching a child how to use a pair of scissors safely, or through play. You might not want to just give young children a pair of scissors to explore how they work.

If children are learning something for the first time, sometimes it is better to teach them explicitly. We know that when we first introduce games that require taking turns, children find this very difficult without adult

instruction and a bit of supervision. But once they have learnt how to take turns, they are very able to play quite happily together. We see this from learning to complete a jigsaw together or playing at cooking in a toy kitchen.

In physical play, children may throw and catch independently, but if they don't know how to do this well, they will improve if an adult shows them how to hold their hands or to track the ball they want to catch. Without this adult intervention, children can go on not knowing how to throw and catch effectively, which can affect their ability to play sport later.

When you know what children already know and can do, and what their next steps are, you can decide effectively on the teaching activities, including play, that will help children progress.

## **The best start in life**

What does all this mean, and particularly in terms of what we – Ofsted – are going to be doing next?

I promised at the beginning that I'd say something about our new strategy. Reflecting on just how important a good early education is, we have been discussing how effectively we inspect and regulate the early years sector and how we can give more prominence to early years in our work.

So we've chosen to have a specific strategic focus on the early years in our next 5 years. We think it's the area in which our work can have the most impact. Our curriculum reviews in schools have helped developed conceptions of high-quality education in different subjects. And we would like to do what we can to build the same level of evidence for early years.

Early years inspection used to be strongly oriented towards childcare. With the EIF, we have rebalanced to look more at education as well as childcare. We're now putting due weight on the substance of early education, reflecting the 7 areas of learning. That means what we're looking for from you is to provide a rounded experience for children.

## **Conclusion**

I know we share the same aim in wanting the very best for young children. We are all determined to help children recover – physically, emotionally and educationally – from the effects of the pandemic.

The last 2 years have been draining for everyone working in education and care. And there are challenges for your sector that pre-date COVID-19 and its restrictions.

I'm determined that the momentum around education recovery shouldn't just start at age 4. The early social and physical development of children is the root from which they grow. Their early exposure to language, numbers and the world around them sets them up for a lifetime of learning.

Our aspiration for early years must be more than just a surviving sector. We should have a thriving sector: valued by government, cherished by parents and giving children the best possible start in life.

So thank you for all you do – and thank you for listening today. My colleague Wendy Ratcliff, who I think many of you will know, and I will be very happy to stay for a while to chat with you.

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## **Enter our competition to be an Ambassador For A Day 2022**

### **Ambassador For A Day activities**

If you win the competition you will be invited to our Queen's Birthday Party celebrations with your parent or legal guardian. Later in the year, you will be able to shadow our ambassador during a typical working day and learn about the work of an ambassador.

### **Why you should enter this competition**

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential. Today there are too few women in international diplomacy, including women from under-represented backgrounds, whether ethnic, religious, economic, cultural, or personal identity, among others. Women are not represented at parity in political and business sectors.

To end this underrepresentation, we must ensure equality of opportunity and equitable outcomes for everyone.

This is why we are encouraging young people to make their voices heard on topics that affect us all. This is why we are opening the Ambassador For A Day 2022 competition to all genders.

We encourage young students to become leaders and advocates for change by offering them the opportunity to take a look behind the scenes of the British Embassy in Luxembourg.

### **Who can enter**

You can enter this competition if, when you apply, you:

- are a student registered in a school in Luxembourg

- are between the ages of 14 and 17 year old at the time of your application
- have your parents consent

You do not need to pay to enter this competition.

## How to enter

To enter, you must answer one of the following questions in no more than 500 words:

- What positive change would you like to see in your community when it comes to dealing with gender inequality?
- How can you contribute to creating a more inclusive environment for all genders?

Write your answer and:

- get your parents or legal guardian's consent to participate
- email your essay and application form to [EnquiriesLux@fcdo.gov.uk](mailto:EnquiriesLux@fcdo.gov.uk)

Your essay should be in English.

## Deadlines

Make sure you enter the competition in time:

- competition opens: 8 March 2022
- deadline for applications: 2 May 2022
- competition winner contacted: 18-24 May 2022
- competition winner announced: 25 May 2022

Apply for the competition by sending your completed [Ambassador For A Day 2022 Application Form](#) (ODT, 6.27 KB) and your essay by 2 May 2022. You should also read the [Terms and Conditions Ambassador for a Day 2022](#) (ODT, 10.9 KB) before you enter.

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## Traffic officers given body cameras to curb abuse from angry road users

The incidents took place between January 2020 and 2021 despite the impact of the Covid lockdowns on traffic numbers.

Body-worn cameras have now been issued to National Highways traffic officers patrolling motorways and some major A roads across the country 24/7, 365 days of the year. The national roll-out started in 2021 and was completed last month when the equipment was issued to colleagues in the Midlands.

Studies have shown that the presence of a camera can reduce the potential for confrontation and, should an incident occur, provide vital evidence needed for a police investigation and ultimately prosecution.

National Highways traffic officers are there to keep people safe and help the roads network run smoothly. Those that patrol the network are often first on the scene if there's an incident and help to reopen the road as soon as possible whether by clearing obstructions and spills, helping with broken-down vehicles or supporting the emergency services.

But despite their primary role being to help, abuse is becoming an increasing problem as they carry out this vital work. Incidents range from abuse being shouted from a vehicle, foul language, objects being thrown, targeted threats and even physical attacks.

Footage has today been released by National Highways of two difficult situations faced by traffic officers which have already been captured on the new cameras.

In [the first clip](#) a lorry driver, annoyed that traffic was at a standstill due to a vehicle running out of fuel, drives towards the traffic officer. The HGV can be seen stopping a short distance away from the traffic officer in this footage and the driver later apologising.

In [the second incident](#), a traffic officer is confronted by a man delayed by an incident on the motorway but who is convinced the traffic is being held unnecessarily.

Meanwhile traffic officer Chris Owen has already discovered how important the cameras can be after being called to the M61, between junctions 8 and 9, to a seemingly intoxicated pedestrian 'walking home to Preston from Manchester'.

She became increasingly aggressive with the traffic officer and, when the police arrived, made allegations against him of inappropriate behaviour.

Chris, who has been a traffic officer for six years, said:

Fortunately the camera could prove that was not the case. Although it was filmed at night the footage was clear. It is reassuring to have that back-up.

Using the cameras can actually de-escalate some situations. Previously people would shout abuse or get angry knowing their actions would not come back on them. Now there is footage.

Although infrequent, complaints against traffic officers have previously relied on all parties giving statements which can often lead to conflicting reports and therefore lengthy and time-consuming investigations. The cameras will provide an accurate account of events.

National Highways Customer Service Director, Mel Clarke, said:

The cameras have been provided to help protect our traffic officers and will be part of their uniform. Like a seat-belt, we hope the camera isn't needed, but it will be there if necessary.

Our traffic officers should not have to face abuse or even threats while simply doing their job – which is to help people and keep our roads moving.

We want to reassure them, and warn anyone who thinks such abuse is acceptable, that we will do all we can to support our traffic officers and vigorously pursue justice for any criminal activities directed towards them.

Traffic officers are wearing Motorola Solutions' VB400 body-worn cameras which are used to support safety across many UK enterprises and organisations including multiple police forces and NHS England's ambulance trusts.

Costing some £500,000 to roll out across the team of traffic officers, the camera units are designed to withstand rigorous use and capture high-quality video and audio in all weather and light conditions. Recorded video is uploaded to the cloud, providing footage which is admissible in court.

Members of the public should contact the National Highways customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Journalists should contact the National Highways press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

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# Making Bishops Stortford a home for 'Ratty'

The Environment Agency is working in partnership with the \*Waterside Stortford Group on an exciting project to improve habitat for water voles and encourage them to make new homes on the Stort Navigation in Bishops Stortford.

Water voles are the UK's largest vole species, made famous by 'Ratty' from *Wind in the Willows*, who despite his name, is actually a water vole. Sadly, they are also one of the UK's fastest declining native mammals. Due to habitat loss and the invasive American mink, they have disappeared from many of the places they used to call home.

Kate Nixon, Biodiversity Officer at the Environment Agency, said:

This fantastic partnership project will see a 60-metre stretch of pre-planted coir rolls installed along the toe of a steep bank close to the Goods Yard footbridge. We'll also be adding bankside vegetation to provide a source of food and cover, allowing water voles to safely move along riverbanks protected from predators.

Through this exciting venture we're very much looking forward to seeing the return of Ratty and friends once more in Bishops Stortford.

The project team will be installing 'coir rolls' along the bankside. These are cylinders made of sustainable waste product from coconut husk contained in a net.

The project will see the improvement of water vole habitat to encourage them to settle on the Stort Navigation

Coir rolls are dual purpose, protecting riverbanks from erosion and providing habitat. They can be planted with established wetland plants before they are installed to provide immediate habitat. These will be pre-planted with a 'water vole-friendly' plant mix, which will also enhance the existing habitat. This work can also benefit waterfowl, providing cover and nesting opportunities.

Where rivers or canals flow through towns, there's less vegetation, hampering the water vole's ability to safely migrate along the river corridor. The project will also help to protect the bank from erosion and in turn protect the towpath.

Hopefully this project will mirror the successful reintroduction project by

Essex Wildlife Trust and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, who in 2015 helped to re-establish a water vole population on the Stort, downstream of Bishops Stortford at Thorley Wash nature reserve.

\*The Waterside Stortford Group is run by Bishops Stortford Town Council and the Canal and River Trust.

The project is being funded by the Waterside Stortford Group and the installation will be carried out by volunteers from Canal and River Trust with support from staff from the Canal and River Trust and the Environment Agency.

The works are due to take place on 9 and 10 March 2022, weather and river conditions permitting.

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## [Reappointment of Jonathan Hall QC as Independent Reviewer](#)

News story

Jonathan Hall QC has been appointed to a further 3 year term as the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation.



Following a successful first term of appointment, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Jonathan Hall QC, has been reappointed for a further term of 3 years from 23 May 2022 until 22 May 2025, in line with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

Jonathan Hall was [first appointed to the role in 2019](#).

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