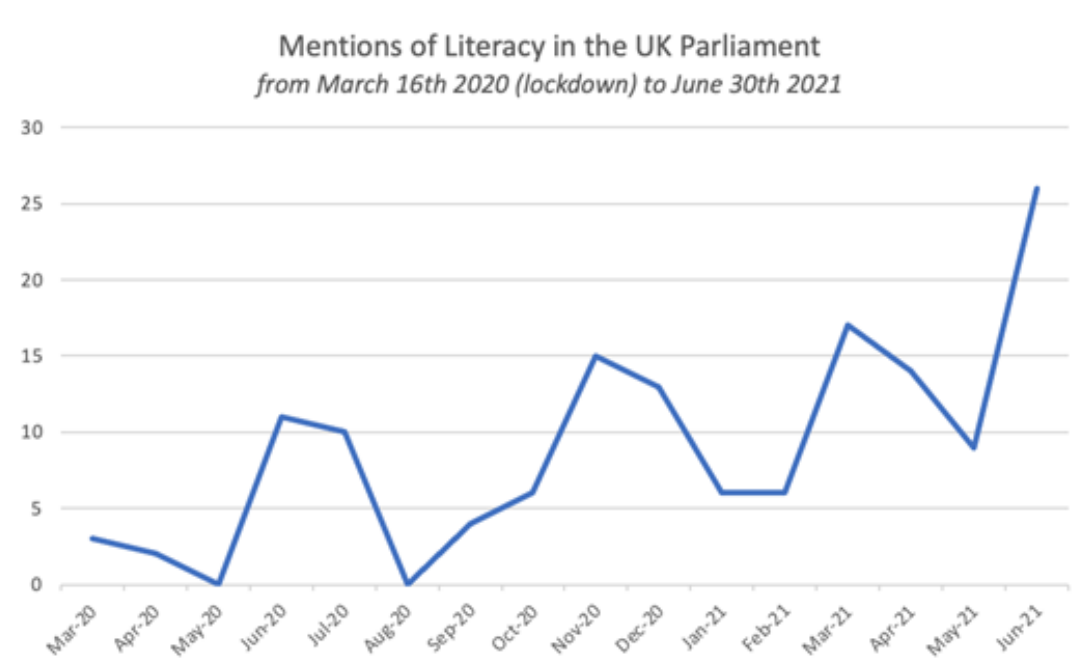


Literacy, COVID-19 and Parliament



Since the start of lockdown on 16 March 2020 to June 30th 2021, literacy has been cited 142 times in parliament. Bearing in mind that the House does not sit during parliament recess, which commonly take place at times such as Easter, the August summer holidays and Christmas, thereby explaining the fluctuations outlined in the chart above, we can nevertheless see that literacy has gained prominence over the past 18 months.

The below is an outline of mentions of note that took place in the Houses of Parliament during that time.

January 2021- June 2021

[Education Recovery House of Commons Debate](#) | **Tuesday 29 June 2021**

Christian Wakeford Member of Parliament for Bury South

The new decade will be challenging indeed. Although the ambition of an education recovery plan is a good start, we need a long-term plan to tackle the attainment gap and falling literacy rates. I look forward to continuing to scrutinise the plans both in my role on the Education Committee and as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on literacy. We are keen to come up with viable solutions to address the severe effect of covid-19 on our children and young people. That should start now.

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Covid-19: Children House of Lords Debate | Thursday 17 June 2021

Lord Bishop of Leeds

The National Literacy Trust rightly recognises that literacy opens routes to health, social equality, reducing poverty and growing the economy—although, as the noble Baroness, Lady Bull, said in a debate a couple of days ago, the arts and humanities do not need an economic justification per se. But if one is required, according to research quoted by the NLT, if every child Toggle showing location of left primary school with reading skills, the economy could expand by more than £32 billion by 2025. Furthermore, literacy failure is estimated to cost £2.5 billion annually.

Children who suffer now might—not inevitably will, but might—damage or inhibit future generations in aspiration, ambition and imagination. That is more than an economic waste; it will mean that we have failed our children and our grandchildren. That cycle needs to be broken.

Baroness Andrews, OBE, FSA

I will very quickly ask the Minister to do three things. First, address the problem raised by the Early Years Alliance this week that early years has been willingly, knowingly underfunded in the past few years and must be put right. Secondly, yes, build the programme around literacy, letting teachers design and drive it and bringing in those brilliant agencies such as the National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency that really know what to do. Thirdly, go back with grace and confidence to Sir Kevan Collins and say, “You were right, we cannot deliver what you want on the basis of what we said”. The Government would have the blessing and support of the country in doing so.

Baroness Uddin

I agree that we are a levelled-up generation and we owe a debt of responsibility to future generations. I am immensely grateful to Barnardo’s, the APPG on Homelessness, the Disabled Children’s Partnership, the Child Poverty Action Group and the National Literacy Trust. I commend their outstanding and continued leadership and advocacy on behalf of the children of our country.

The Rt Hon. the Lord Rooker

The brief from the National Literacy Trust makes the telling point that, before the second and third lockdowns, all year groups had experienced around a two-month reading loss, leading to poor language skills, which impacts on achievements and employment prospects. At five, poor language skills are linked to behavioural and mental health problems in later life. The trust also concludes that:

“the link between poverty, educational attainment and basic skills is stronger in England than in any other developed country.”

I ask the Minister why this is.

Education Recovery House of Lords Debate | Tuesday 8 June 2021

The Rt Hon. Baroness Prashar of Runnymede, CBE

Can the Minister assure the House that early years recovery will be a specific focus and that the amount of pupil premium will be increased in the early years sector to reflect more accurately the influence on children’s lives during this critical stage? Furthermore, will the focus on learning through play, communication skills, literacy and numeracy, and the retention and professional development of early years teachers, be prioritised?

Queen’s Speech House of Lords Debate | Tuesday 18 May 2021

Baroness Drake CBE

The evidence reveals the practical challenges facing ordinary people in virtual hearings, including—among other things—limited broadband access; phones or iPads shared between users in a household; no private space; a dependency on pay-as-you-go phones and expensive data packages; sensory impairments; and limited digital literacy.

A Brighter Future for the Next Generation House of Commons Debate | Thursday 13 May 2021

Christian Wakeford Member of Parliament for Bury South

However, to ensure a bright future, we need to address the elephant in the room: illiteracy. The BBC launched its programme this Monday to get the roughly 9 million people who have difficulties with reading talking about the issue and improving the country’s literacy rates. Not reading holds us all back in terms of health, employment, opportunity and family. If someone cannot help their own child with their homework because they are unable to read, they are holding their child back, too.

It has taken many years to overcome the stigma of mental health. With the help of the National Literacy Trust, which provides the secretariat for the all-party parliamentary group on literacy that I am fortunate to chair, we will overcome the stigma of illiteracy as well, because it cannot be right that in the 21st century one in six people in Britain, one in four in Scotland and one in eight in Wales are unable to read.

Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning House of Commons Debate | Thursday 15 April 2021

Fleur Anderson Member of Parliament for Putney

There are lots of places on our high streets that could provide the necessary transformation and high profile for adult learning.

That one innovative change—having a community learning centre in every town—would bring together so many different solutions. The centres could be well-known Toggle showing location of places that provide information and support. They would help to overcome the current fragmented funding and provision, which the Government acknowledge, but do not address, in their response to the Select Committee’s report.

It is very hard to access information and to get the required mentoring and support for learning. That is acknowledged by the Government, and it has been recognised by others who have spoken today. That is why there is a recommendation in the report for careers guidance, information and support. It can be especially difficult when someone is working two jobs or caring for children or parents; when there are so many different providers with different and changing courses in different places, most of which are currently without childcare on site; or if someone’s literacy or confidence are not very good, they have special educational needs or they think that learning is not for them.

Inclusive Society House of Lords Debate | Wednesday 14 April 2021

Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer

My Lords, one of the results of the pandemic is that an already very poor literacy rate in schools will have worsened further. Adults with poor literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed or in low-paid jobs and there is a link between low levels of literacy and shorter life expectancy, depression and obesity. Nine million adults in the UK are functionally illiterate.

All my younger working life was involved with the book trade, publishing and bookselling. Books were fundamental to my world, so it came as a shock when, in my 20s, I began to realise just how many adults could not read. For some time, I volunteered for what is now the excellent National Literacy Trust. As I got to know my students, it shocked me just how excluded from normal everyday life they were. Illiteracy equals exclusion.

Covid-19: Impact on Education | Monday 15 March 2021

Jonathan Gullis Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent North

I will talk about some of my other pet peeves, which the Minister knows I am a fan of doing. If we are really going to sort out education, we need a standardised national written test in every school for all year groups—from reception to year 11—so that everyone does the same. At primary, it would be literacy and numeracy, and at secondary, it would be English, maths and science, so that we would have some actual data on the full impact of loss of learning. That would help schools to understand what they need to do to help their students catch up in the long term.

Education Route Map: Covid-19 House of Commons Debate | Thursday 25 February 2021

Wes Streeting, Member of Parliament for Ilford North

It did not need to be like this. If the Government want a route map to a future of closing the attainment gap, lifting millions of children out of poverty and ensuring a bright future for this country, they need look no further than the record of the last Labour Government. Funding per pupil doubled. There were 48,000 more teachers, 230,000 more support staff and teaching assistants, 2,200 Sure Start children’s centres and record numbers of university places. We doubled the number of apprenticeships, and we recognised that families and family conditions matter, which is why we put child benefit up by 26% and gave working parents the child tax credit. The new deal helped 1.8 million people into work. A million social homes were brought up to a decent standard. Three million children received child trust funds. The impact of that was to lift 2 million children out of poverty, produce record levels of literacy and numeracy and narrow the attainment gap.

Damian Hinds Member of Parliament for East Hampshire

Secondly, alongside the professionals, we need a volunteer army. A lot of course happens in schools already with volunteer readers, STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—ambassadors, mentoring programmes and so on. We do not need to replace those things, but we need to see how we can grow them and be yet more ambitious. I would like every organisation and company in this country to have a board meeting item to discuss how they can support this great endeavour for our children. It might be giving staff time for mentoring or careers advice, but it could also, as with the Hungry Little Minds campaign, be where companies work out how they can, in their business activity, help support early literacy development.

School Closures: Support for Pupils | Wednesday 13 January 2021

Matt Western Member of Parliament for Warwick and Leamington

Of course it is all too easy to think of the issue as about purely the supply of laptops, but even when a household has a device and internet access that does not mean that the pupil can make use of them, because of such factors as low parental computer literacy, parents who work from home needing to use the device, school- age siblings also needing to use it, or simply access to broadband capacity. Perhaps there may also be a lack of access to printers or other hardware in the household.

July 2020- December 2020

Engagements Debate | Wednesday 9 December 2020

Julie Marson Member of Parliament for Hertford and Stortford

I am supporting “Turn on the Subtitles”—a campaign led by my Bishop’s Stortford constituent Henry Warren. There is a wealth of evidence that default same-language

subtitling can have a dramatic effect on children’s literacy, particularly for disadvantaged children. I know that that is a great priority for the Prime Minister, given the potential impact of covid on the attainment gap. Will he support a Government consultation to turn on the subtitles in order to really explore this potentially transformative opportunity?

Covid-19: Public Health Information House of Lords Debate | Tuesday 8 December 2020

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff

Will the Government collate all resources available into an online library? This should include resources produced by them and all relevant charities, such as Books Beyond Words, to link easy-to-read pictorial guides and signing videos covering Covid-19 regulations, testing and vaccination to support those with learning difficulties and cognitive impairments, including people with dementia or literacy difficulties. They might find that a resource produced by a different organisation is particularly helpful to their personal situation and would help them understand the pandemic-control measures that are required nationally.

Digital Infrastructure, Connectivity and Accessibility House of Commons | Thursday 3 December 2020

Julie Elliott Member of Parliament for Sunderland Central

In our report, we recommended investment in existing programmes for device distribution, such as DevicesDotNow, and in existing community groups that work in harder-to-reach communities, teaching digital literacy. More must be done to educate people about online fraud and equip them with the skills to identify fraud and report it. We need to invest in lifelong learning hubs in partnership with local authorities and businesses, and we need more cross-departmental collaboration.

Chi Onwurah Member of Parliament for Newcastle upon Tyne Central

I am aware that the Minister previously told the Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport that although he wanted to do more to help those who are digitally excluded, there were limited resources. I think the Chair of the Select Committee dealt effectively with that point. I urge the Minister to find the political will and set out plans to ensure that nobody in the UK is left behind through a lack of digital literacy in this digital age, and that everyone can be an active participant in our increasingly digital world. Digital should be an enabler, not a divider.

International Men’s Day House of Commons Debate | Thursday 19 November 2020

Charlotte Nichols Member of Parliament for Warrington North

We have rightly heard today about the challenges of boys’ educational attainment and the need for schools and the Department for Education to address this. Whether this means

more male teachers, more male role models or closer support and attention to alternative teaching methods, it is a real concern. The literacy gap between boys and girls peaks at 16, when children are beginning to consider their choices for life after school.

Covid-19 House of Commons Debate | Wednesday 11 November 2020

Andrea Leadsom Member of Parliament for South Northamptonshire

The pandemic has forced us to focus anew on those in society who need our help, including people who have suffered greatly. First, how do we ensure that never again will schoolchildren have to face teacher-assessed grades, with all the potential professional implications that that has for their lives? How will we make sure that younger children catch up so that we do not have a cohort who always struggle with literacy and numeracy?

March 2020- June 2020

Covid-19: Pre-school Sector House of Lords Debate | Monday 8 June 2020

The Rt Hon. Baroness Prashar of Runnymede, CBE

Does the Minister agree that as crucial as supporting the preschool sector at this stage is investment in under-fives provision, as severe lifelong impacts can result from deprivation of care, Toggle showing location of stimulation and learning? Evidence shows that the literacy skills gap starts at the age of five. This deficit takes years to recover from and impacts on social mobility.

Baroness Berridge of The Vale of Catmose | Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System at the Department for Education

The noble Baroness is correct that it is vital we ensure that disadvantaged children get the best start at this stage in early years so that they can fully access the curriculum when they enter mainstream school. We have invested £60 million over the last two years in specific initiatives to help the language and literacy development of young children, exemplified by the department's Hungry Little Minds campaign, which saw over 180,000 new users at the start of lockdown.