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Baroness Bull
House of Lords
SW1A 0AA

8 July 2025

Dear Deborah

Many thanks for providing these insightful questions for further discussion. Kindly see below responses, which I hope will be helpful to you and any other members who attended the debate.

Will government intervene to ensure that approved qualifications also include learning to identify dyscalculia?

We know that effective early identification and intervention is critical in improving the outcomes of children and young people with a special educational need or disability.

Under the Children and Families Act 2014, mainstream schools must use their “best endeavours” to make sure a child or young person with SEN gets the special educational provision they need. The SEND code of practice, which extends from birth to 25 years of age, makes it clear that meeting the needs of a child or young person with SEN does not require a diagnostic label or test. Instead, we expect teachers to monitor the progress of all children and young people and put support in place where needed.

The first response when any child is falling behind in school is good quality teaching. When a pupil needs additional support, the school should work closely with the family and the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to plan an intervention, implement it, and then review the outcome and progressively repeat this cycle until the child’s SEN is properly supported. This is the ‘graduated response’.

A key ask from the dyscalculia community is for government to adopt an official definition of developmental dyscalculia. Can government respond positively to this call?

The Department does not set the specific terminology used to describe conditions such as dyscalculia, as these descriptions are determined at the local level. However, we know that educational psychologists use dyscalculia definitions, as well as wider learning difficulties with maths when assessing a child or young person to identify where they experience specific difficulties with numbers or mathematics. They can then recommend appropriate strategies and interventions to support the child’s learning and development.

I also noted that government does not collect detailed data on specific learning difficulties, which makes it impossible to understand prevalence and co-occurrence. Will DfE move to collecting this level of granular detail?

Further building on the above, we believe that an inclusive mainstream approach will be most effective for supporting all children and young people to achieve and thrive in education.

A successful inclusive education system requires moving away from the current reliance on labels, plans and diagnoses before support materialises – it needs to be able to accurately assess children and young people's learning and development, and to effectively support their educational needs with evidence-based responses.

Would DfE consider a campaign, perhaps in partnership with the Dyscalculia Network and the British Dyslexia Association?

Our Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group, chaired by Professor Karen Guldberg of Birmingham University, will provide further insight on what provision and support in mainstream educational settings should look like for neurodivergent children and young people within an inclusive system.

The group brings together experts including clinicians, scientists and academics, education professionals, and charities representing specific types of neurodivergence. We have been clear that in developing their advice, we expect the group to draw on a wide range of inputs, including other sector experts and stakeholders, to ensure appropriate coverage of other types of neurodivergence.

Professor Guldberg recently met with stakeholders with lived experience of, or representing those with dyscalculia, including the Dyscalculia Network.

I would be grateful to hear how government will review the effectiveness of the ITTECF delivering for students with specific learning disabilities.

The Department for Education's 2023 review of content for the ITTECF paid particular attention to the needs of trainees and ECTs when supporting pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). There is now significantly more content related to adaptive teaching and supporting pupils with SEND. The adaptive teaching content includes, for example, developing an understanding of different pupil needs, and learning how to provide opportunities for success for all pupils.

The ITTECF deliberately does not detail approaches to specific additional needs, but what makes the most effective teaching for all pupils, including those with SEND. The Department tested this approach with SEND educational experts from the ITT sector and beyond, with consensus that the needs of most children can be met through high-quality teaching. Where a classroom teacher requires additional support for children with an individual need, this will be provided or commissioned by the SENCo in their school.

We recognise that continuous improvement is essential to transform the training and support for all new teachers, and to review the experiences and needs of ECTs as well as trainees. That's why we have committed to a full review of the support for ECTs, including the content of the ITTECF, in 2027 to ensure it continues to provide the best possible support for new teachers based on the most up to date evidence. This review will include a focus on teaching pupils with SEND.

Will DfE review the take up of SEND-related CPD and promote the use of educational resources like UCL's ADD UP toolkit?

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Beyond the training for new teachers based on the ITTECF, school leaders are responsible for ensuring their workforce has appropriate training to meet the needs of all pupils, which is in line with the department's position on school autonomy and school leaders being best placed to assess the needs of their pupils and workforce.

Within DfE, we have commissioned evidence reviews from University College London, which will help to drive inclusive practices by highlighting what the best available evidence suggests are the most effective tools, strategies and approaches for teachers and other relevant staff in mainstream settings to identify and support children and young people with different types of needs.

Through our Universal SEND Services programme, professionals can also access online training to develop their understanding of how the curriculum can be adapted to support learners to develop their mathematical thinking. This includes approaches to support learners who face barriers to understanding of maths such as those with SEND or dyscalculia.

In addition, the What Works in SEND research programme, led by a research team from the University of Warwick and supported by SEND academics from the University of Birmingham, will soon begin researching tools that schools can use to identify the needs of neurodivergent children. The research is expected to be completed by March 2026, and once published, will provide practical guidance to teachers and other professionals in mainstream settings, helping them to identify the needs of children and young people (ages 0–25).

Will government take steps to address the funding gap between dyslexia and dyscalculia to increase understanding about dyscalculia and knowledge of which interventions are most effective?

Further to the ongoing research programme, the Department is also providing a £1 billion increase to high needs funding to help meet the increase in costs local authorities will be facing this year, as they in turn provide support to schools and colleges, and ultimately to children and young people with SEND.

We put trust in school leaders to decide how to spend their budgets to meet their legal duties and other responsibilities, including support for their pupils with SEND, such as those with dyscalculia.

The general tendency for government policies to prioritise literacy over numeracy was also raised – including the absence of any reference to numeracy in the ITTECF, despite multiple mentions of literacy. Can this omission be addressed?

The ITTECF content has been updated based on a Call for Evidence, feedback from experts, and lessons learned from the first few years of the Core Content Framework implementation and delivery of Early Career Framework-based induction. The updates include more content on supporting pupils with SEND, high quality oral language, early cognitive development, and evidence literacy. In addition, a new statement has been added regarding pupils' positive dispositions and attitudes towards mathematics.

The ITTECF is universal and designed to work for all teachers, across all phases and subjects. As such, the framework does not include subject-specific content. The framework sets out a minimum entitlement to training and is not a full curriculum. It remains for accredited ITT providers and ECT training lead providers to integrate additional analysis and critique of theory, research, and expert practice as they deem appropriate for their curriculum to ensure it is responsive to the needs of the participants and individual school settings.

The inclusion of pupil literacy and oral language skills are vital as they underpin all learning and foster effective classroom communication. By equipping new teachers with strategies to develop these areas, the framework ensures they can better support pupils' academic success and personal development across the curriculum.

The frameworks need to evolve as the underpinning evidence evolves, so we have committed to a full review of the programme in 2027 to ensure it continues to provide the best possible support for ECTs.

Regarding practical steps to improve numeracy and the teaching of mathematics for all pupils in publicly funded schools, we fund the Maths Hubs programme. The programme covers primary, secondary and special

schools and uses a mastery-based teaching approach, which aims to secure understanding of key concepts. This includes training for teachers on techniques such as avoiding cognitive overload by breaking the learning down into small manageable steps; using representations to expose mathematical structure; and ensuring that learning is sequenced in a coherent manner so it makes sense to pupils.

What assessment has government made of the arguments for changes to GCSE maths? And will government work with stakeholders across education and industry to assess where maths GCSE is relevant to post 16 education and career pathways and, where it is not, remove the requirement to achieve it?

As you will be aware, the government has established an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review, covering ages 5 to 18, chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE, an expert in education policy, including curriculum and social inequality.

The Review will look at ensuring all young people aged 16-19 have access to rigorous and high-value qualifications and training that will give them the skills they need to seize opportunity as well as ensuring they are ready for the changing workplace.

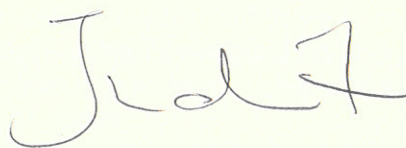
Its interim report was published in March 2025 and stated that the 'Review Panel heard strong evidence that a minimum of a grade 4 in English and maths should continue to be the ambition for as many learners as possible'.

In line with these findings, we believe that gaining level 2 skills in maths helps students realise their potential, and gives them the opportunity to progress in life, learning and work.

The Review will continue to seek to address the key problems and hard barriers to achievement in curriculum and assessment, including post-16 education.

Please don't hesitate to write back if you have any further questions or comments to raise. I will deposit a copy of this letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Julia', with a stylized flourish at the end.

BARONESS BLAKE OF LEEDS, CBE