

Response to Request for Evidence under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006
Reference M2/SAGE/01/RFA

Professor Rebecca Allen (PD)
26th September 2022

Since I only attended one SAGE meeting during the pandemic, I am providing a relatively short response.

1. A brief overview of your qualifications, career history, professional expertise and major publications

Professional expertise

- School policy in England
- Teacher careers and daily lives
- Quantitative research methods – both administrative and survey data

Present Appointment

2020 Professor of Education, University of Brighton (part-time)
2017- Co-founder and Chief Analyst at Teacher Tapp, a teacher survey app utilising experience sampling methods to collect daily information on the lives of thousands of teachers in the UK

Past Appointments

2018 Professor of Education, UCL Institute of Education, London
2015-2017 Founding Director of Education Datalab
2008-2015 Reader in Economics of Education, Institute of Education, University of London
(Appointment as Senior Lecturer in 2010; Reader in 2012; on leave from January 2015)
2003-2004 Secondary school economics and maths teacher, London
1999-2002 Equity Research Analyst, JPMorgan Securities Ltd, London

Qualifications

2008 PhD in Economics of Education, Institute of Education, University of London
Choice-based secondary school admissions in England: Social stratification and the distribution of educational outcomes
2005 MRes in Social Research Methods (with distinction), Institute of Education, London
2002 PGCE (Economics and Business), Institute of Education, University of London
1999 BA (Hons) Economics and Mathematics (class: 2:i), University of Cambridge

Major publications (full list at <http://rebeccaallen.co.uk/publications/>)

Sims, S., Jerrim, J., Taylor, H. and Allen, R. (2022). Is teaching bad for your health? New evidence from biomarker data, *Oxford Review of Education*, 48(1), 28-45.

Allen, R., Evans, M. and White, B. (2021). *The next big thing in school improvement*. Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.

Hobbiss, M., Sims, S. and Allen, R. (2021). Habit formation limits growth in teacher effectiveness: A review of converging evidence from neuroscience and social science, *Review of Education*, 9(1), 3-23.

Jerrim, J., Sims, S., Taylor, H. and Allen, R. (2020). How does the mental health and wellbeing of teachers compare to other professions? Evidence from eleven survey datasets, *Review of Education*, 8(3), 659-689.

Allen, R. and Sims, S. (2018). *The Teacher Gap*, London: Routledge.

Allen, R. and Sims, S. (2018). Do pupils from low-income families get low-quality teachers? Indirect evidence from English schools. *Oxford Review of Education*, 44:4, 441-458. DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2017.1421152.

Allen, R. and Allnutt, J. (2017) The impact of Teach First on pupil attainment at age 16, *British Educational Research Journal*. 43(4) 627–646. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/berj.3288>.

Allen, R. and Burgess, S. (2013) Evaluating the provision of school performance information for school choice, *Economics of Education Review*, 34(2013) pp.175-190.

Allen, R., Coldron, J. and West, A. (2012) The effect of changes in published secondary school admissions on social composition, *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(3) pp.349-366.

2. A list of the groups (i.e. SAGE and/or any of its sub-groups) in which you have been a participant, and the relevant time periods

SAGE – attendee at single meeting on 1st May 2020 where the topic of school re-openings was discussed

(NB. I was also an advisor to the examinations regulator Ofqual regarding Centre Assessed Grades throughout 2020 and 2021 but I believe this falls outside your scope.)

3. An overview of your involvement with those groups between January 2020 and February 2022, including:

a. When and how you came to be a participant

I was invited by Osama Rahman at Department for Education. I had known both Osama Rahman and Jonathan Slater for many years because of giving ad-hoc advice to DfE and chairing one of their working groups. He was aware that my organisation was surveying over 8,000 teachers in England every single day and that, during the pandemic, we became the primary source of intelligence about what was happening on the ground during school closures.

b. The number of meetings you attended, and your contributions to those meetings

Just one meeting on 1st May 2020. I can recall making relatively little contribution to the meeting since most of the time was taken up discussing a model of the contribution to R if schools re-opened under different scenarios.

c. Your role in providing research, information and advice

Very little. Following the meeting I shared further thoughts in an email with Jonathan Slater, Osama Rahman and Tim Leunig (at Treasury).

Our data on teacher activities during school closures was freely available to Civil Servants who were able to ask us any follow-up questions.

4. A summary of any documents to which you contributed for the purpose of advising SAGE and/or its related subgroups on the Covid-19 pandemic

I don't think I have any.

5. A summary of any articles you have written, interviews and/or evidence you have given regarding the work of the above-mentioned groups and/or the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Whilst I have given many interviews (usually podcasts for teachers) about the impact of the pandemic on schools and pupils, and these have included my thoughts on the Government response, I do not believe I have ever commented on the role of the SAGE committee.

6. Your views as to whether the work of the above-mentioned groups in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (or the UK's response more generally) succeeded in its aims

I do not feel able to comment on this since I had minimal involvement in these groups. I do have views on the Government response in general, but I do not believe these are in scope.

7. Your views as to any lessons that can be learned from the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Like most experts, I could write a 100,000 word thesis on schooling during the pandemic but this would take me a while to write and you a while to read!

Rather than talk about 'benefit of hindsight' viewpoints, I will simply list the things I noted to Osama Rahman at the time:

1. The discussion within SAGE of school re-openings mainly constituted examination of a mathematical model showing which of a few rather similar re-opening scenarios would result in a lower R. There was no discussion of more radical plans to reduce child-to-child mixing whilst re-opening schools. Was this because the experts still didn't believe that schools were an important source of transmission? Or was this because there weren't really any schooling experts in the room who could propose more radical ideas (NB. Department for Education officials aren't in a position to do this since they have little contact with schools.)?
2. In the case of secondary schools, I couldn't understand why the meeting was not talking about how to reduce student mixing during the day. This means addressing: (1) how much to disrupt the curriculum for different year groups so that students could solely study with their own form class; (2) issues of school transport, sibling interactions and running long opening days with multiple shifts; (3) re-organising lunch and break times. Essentially, these things were left up to individual headteachers with little or no guidance. We 'got away' with ignoring attempts to radically reduce R whilst re-opening schools because teenagers weren't typically causalities of the pandemic. However, we need to be prepared for future scenarios where reducing transmission rates is more critical.
3. By May 1st 2020, it was already becoming clear to anyone who had contact with children and teenagers that protecting their mental wellbeing needed to be high on the priority list. I argued to Osama that it needed to be higher than worrying about examination classes. It seemed obvious to me that we need to ensure that every single young person was able to leave their home and attend school for one (morning or afternoon) session each week. We didn't do this because we prioritised full-time attendance of examination classes in Years 6, 10 and 12. Consequently, students in Years 2,3,4,5,7,8,9,11 and 13 were at home without being able to see their school friends from March 2020 through to the start of September. Schools and parents are now having to face the damaging consequences of that decision.