

Witness Name: John Matthew

Roberts

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits:JMR/INQ000000000

Dated: 1 July 2025

## UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOHN MATTHEW ROBERTS

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I, JOHN MATTHEW ROBERTS, of Oak National Academy Limited will say as follows: -

#### **Introductory matters**

1. I make this witness statement further to receipt of a Rule 9 letter from the UK Covid-19 Inquiry ("**the Inquiry**") dated 25 April 2025. I have prepared this witness statement to assist the Inquiry in its understanding of Oak National Academy Limited ["**Oak**"] and Oak's response to the pandemic. As requested, this statement will focus on the period 1 January 2020 to 28 June 2022 ["**the Specified Period**"]. However, Oak did not exist prior to April 2020 and therefore this witness statement addresses the period from the founding of Oak in April 2020 until 28 June 2022. The facts and matters set out in this statement are within my own knowledge unless otherwise stated, and I believe them to be true. When I refer to information supplied by others, the source of the information is identified; facts and matters derived from other sources are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. On behalf of everyone at Oak, I would like to start by expressing my deepest sympathy to all those who lost loved ones during the Covid-19 pandemic and those affected in many other ways, including those who continue to be affected.

3. I am employed as the Interim Chief Executive Officer (“**CEO**”) of Oak. I am responsible for the overall leadership, management and staffing of Oak and for agreeing the strategy and direction with Oak’s Board and with officials and Ministers of the Department for Education (“**DfE**”). As CEO, I am also ex officio Oak’s Accounting Officer.
4. I joined Oak when it was established in April 2020 and became Oak’s Director of Product and Engineering on 4 January 2021. I held this position until 1 April 2025, when I became Oak’s Interim CEO. I was appointed to this position following the resignation of the previous CEO of Oak, Matthew Hood OBE. Matthew Hood was the co-founder of Oak and its first CEO. He left Oak on 31 March 2025.
5. I have eighteen years’ experience working in the education sector. I hold a Physics and Astronomy degree from the University of Sheffield, and I am a qualified teacher.
6. I began my teaching career as a science teacher at George Tomlinson School in the North West of England in 2007. I joined the senior leadership team of George Tomlinson School in 2008 as the Assistant Director of Specialism (Maths and Computing) and I was appointed Director of Standards in 2009. While teaching at George Tomlinson School, I developed a cloud-based behaviour management product that was later used commercially by several other schools in the UK.
7. In 2011, I founded Edapt, which provides edu-legal support (i.e. casework services in employment disputes and allegations) to teachers and school staff. I served as CEO of Edapt until July 2022 and have served as a Company Director and Chair of the Board since July 2022. Since 2011, I have also worked as an independent consultant to a range of organisations in the education, technology and publishing sectors, including Usborne Books, Teach Your Monster to Read, Ambition Institute and Ark Schools.
8. Alongside employed and paid work, I have also served as Trustee and Chair of the National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS) and the elected Vice

President of the British Mountaineering Council (BMC), the National Representative Body for rock climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers and the National Governing Body (NGB) for competition climbing which became an Olympic sport in Tokyo 2020.

9. In preparation of this witness statement, I have referred to records and documents, true copies of which are exhibited to this statement, marked JMR. Where a document exhibited to this witness statement has been redacted, this is because the material in it is either irrelevant, contains personal data relating to other individuals or is subject to legal professional privilege.
10. I note that I have not, in preparing this witness statement, been able to access all potentially relevant documents which would have been held by Oak when it was an incubated non-legal entity as part of the Reach Foundation (“**Reach**”) (which I explain below). Oak was an incubated non-legal entity of Reach from April 2020 (i.e. from its inception) until it became an Arm’s Length Body (“**ALB**”) of the DfE on 1 September 2022 (which post-dates the Specified Period for the purposes of this witness statement).
11. Oak very much welcomes the work of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry and will work with the Inquiry in an open and transparent manner to learn lessons and support any improvement to the country's ability to respond to a pandemic.

#### **Part A: Nature and origins of Oak National Academy**

12. On 8 April 2020 I received a text message from Matthew Hood (who I had known since 2007 when we trained as teachers together through the teacher training and leadership development charity, Teach First and had since worked together at The Institute for Teaching and Ambition Institute) asking if I would be able to join a call with him to discuss “opening a national online school for everyone in a week”. Matthew Hood and I discussed the technical challenges of launching such a project, and whilst I had existing commitments to fulfil, I began to work through how it might be feasible to build and launch a product and platform in the time frame.

13. After 8 April 2020, and around other commitments, I worked closely with Matthew Hood and other members of the founding Oak team and was responsible for ensuring the website and technology were in place to enable Oak to launch on 20 April 2020 (when schools were due to re-open after the Easter holidays).
14. I was not party to the initial conversations, which were held prior to my involvement from 8 April 2020, and which subsequently led to the establishment of Oak. Those conversations were held by Oak's previous CEO (and co-founder), Matthew Hood, with third parties. I spoke to Matthew Hood very frequently following 8 April 2020 and, whilst I do not recall precisely when these conversations took place, I recall having several conversations with Matthew Hood about how Oak came to be established. I therefore set out below what I recall from those conversations to the best of my ability.
15. Following the announcement on 18 March 2020 by the then Secretary of State for Education (Sir Gavin Williamson CBE) that schools would close early for the Easter holidays due to the rising number of Covid-19 cases, I believe that, on or about 3 April 2020, Matthew Hood was asked by Chris Paterson, the then policy adviser to the Secretary of State for Education (who Matthew Hood knew from his previous employment at Ambition Institute and other education roles), to join a call with David Thomas OBE, a head teacher at Jane Austen College in Norwich (who, I believe, Matthew also knew through being alumni of Teach First). A call took place, and I believe there were discussions to consider what the education sector should be doing in response to the pandemic, akin to the health sector's response in building Nightingale hospitals.
16. I understand from my conversations with Matthew Hood that, on that call, there was general agreement that:
- i) Education's big challenge was to keep pupils learning during a lockdown;
  - ii) Every school in England needed to set itself up as a remote school, in order to deliver remote learning before the new term was due to start on 20 April 2020;
  - iii) Due to each school's different familiarity with technology, some schools would have a greater ability than others to complete this complex task.

17. Following that call, I believe that Matthew Hood wrote a note of his ideas to create a national online school, the function of which would be to provide asynchronous learning through video lessons that any teacher, pupil or parent could access to support children's education while schools worked to switch to remote learning provision. I believe that the working title of this school was Lovelace Academy (which was later changed to Oak National Academy), and I exhibit the note written by Matthew Hood on 4 April 2020 at JMR/01-INQ000621508.
18. The intentions and plans for developing Oak then began to evolve, and I believe that Matthew Hood, Chris Paterson, and David Thomas then included Rory Gribbell (a Schools' policy advisor within the DfE) and Tom Shinner (a McKinsey management consultant who was involved in the Government's response to the pandemic) in their discussions about what Oak's function should be and how it should operate.
19. I believe, again from my discussions with Matthew Hood in April 2020, that it was agreed that he would lead the organisation with David Thomas leading the education work. Chris Paterson and Rory Gribbell were tasked with obtaining backing from the DfE, and they introduced Matthew Hood and David Thomas to a number of officials within the DfE who were allocated to provide oversight and practical support, given the national nature of the project, the likely need for funding and appropriate governance and quality standards. I believe that Sir Nicolas Gibb, the then Minister of State for Schools, was the Minister responsible for this work at the time.
20. When Matthew Hood contacted me on 8 April 2020 the project had a working name of "QEII Academy". The initial technology plan drafted by myself and David Thomas on 8 or 9 April 2020 was to use Google Classroom, but this was ultimately not a feasible option. This initial plan is exhibited at JMR/02-INQ000621519.

21. Over the following days, we discussed the feasibility of launching such a significant product within two weeks and the focus and support that this would require. This included:
- i) a name, design and brand;
  - ii) technology such as Google Workspace and Slack to communicate across a rapidly expanding team that was entirely remote due to lockdown;
  - iii) a standard structure and format for the education content to be created by curriculum partners;
  - iv) a secure and easy-to-use public-facing product capable of supporting a significant volume of traffic;
  - v) the ability to upload and administer large amounts of educational content.
22. Around the time that I joined Oak on 8 April 2020, I recall that Matthew Hood and David Thomas approached the CEOs of some of the largest and most successful Multi-Academy Trusts (“**MATs**”) in England to secure their backing for the proposals and their agreement to become Oak’s curriculum partners. I was not involved in those discussions. The involvement of the MATs was crucial in providing the underlying curriculum (topics and content to be studied in each subject, how this was broken down into individual lessons and the order in which these should be taught) and supplying teachers who would create the associated lesson resources. This approach of schools and MATs (and later other education organisations and publishers) being commissioned to provide and create lesson and resource content, rather than this being created by Oak itself, has been fundamental to Oak’s model and approach. This approach continues today and has been an essential part of gaining the support and trust of teachers and the wider education sector.
23. On 10 April 2020, the project became known as Oak National Academy and the website domain thenational.academy was registered. Confirmation of this registration is exhibited at JMR/03-INQ000621530.
24. Matthew Hood began to put a senior management team in place, including Jonathan Dando (who Matthew also knew through Teach First). Jonathan would lead on external relations and initially worked on a pro bono secondment, before

becoming Oak's Director of External Relations. Around other existing commitments, I focused on planning, designing and building the technology to enable an online product to launch by 20 April 2020, which included:

- i) contacting product management, software engineering, and product design colleagues for availability to support in a variety of areas, including product design, technical and platform architecture and software engineering;
- ii) setting up the technology operations required to support the Oak team and curriculum partners;
- iii) making initial designs and wireframes of the online product to share with colleagues.

25. Becoming a charity was the most obvious legal entity to set up Oak's legal and governance structure. However, as this would be likely to take a lengthy period of time, this was not feasible, as providing support for schools was needed in a matter of days. I believe that Matthew Hood approached Ed Vainker OBE, the CEO at Reach, as he believed that an incubation arrangement could be set up quickly and that this would provide the necessary good governance, charitable structure and processes, such as finance and human resources, which would be required. I understand that the trustees of Reach were agreeable to this arrangement, and so Reach became Oak's incubator.

26. As well as Matthew Hood and others securing support from the DfE (including an informal agreement on funding), curriculum partners to produce resources, a senior internal team, an incubator (Reach), and a project board (to advise us on our curriculum, operations and product development, comprising of education sector professionals, details of which can be found at page 41 of our September 2020 - July 20/21 Annual Report (exhibited as JMR/12-INQ000621511), Oak also gained support from a pro-bono management consultancy team at McKinsey and Co. I reached out to contacts in technology to assist me in building the product and platform, and other colleagues reached out to their respective contacts in marketing and operations for assistance. From 10 - 19 April 2020 (as it became clear that schools would not re-open for the summer term), we all worked together to put our proposed operating model in place.

27. The period between 10 - 19 April 2020 was short but incredibly intense, with the team collectively working a huge number of hours to enable a successful launch of Oak. It involved creating our online platform (from which all of our curriculum resources would be accessible) and preparing approximately 180 lessons for launch on 20 April 2020. This was only possible because of the incredible effort of all the organisations we worked with and the many teachers who gave their time to developing lesson resources.
28. Significant effort was required to ensure that the platform was secure against cyber attacks and resilient to very large volumes of traffic. Oak was designed to be as open and accessible as possible, specifically not requiring a user to log in, ensuring that as many pupils as possible could access the platform, and so that personally identifiable information collected was minimal. Oak used Google Analytics to understand initial usage, but the collection of this data was intentionally anonymised. Oak's 'Privacy Policy' at this time is exhibited at JMR/04-INQ000621533.
29. On 19 April 2020, the launch of Oak was announced by the Secretary of State for Education at the government's daily Covid briefing. I refer the Inquiry to the announcement which is exhibited at JMR/05-INQ000621534. At approximately 5am on 20 April 2020 (the first day of the summer term when schools remained closed to the majority of pupils, due to the ongoing lockdown), Oak was launched. Approximately 500,000 users visited Oak on 20 April 2020. Within the first week of Oak launching, pupils took part in 2 million lessons and by the end of the summer term in July 2020, there had been 4.7 million visits to our website, with pupils taking part in 20 million lessons. Further information about how Oak's resources were used in our first term can be found in our first evaluation report, "End of term report: Insights and Reflections from Oak's First Term", at pages 7 -11 of JMR/06-INQ000621535, and in paragraph 39 of this witness statement.
30. During this initial period of operation (from April - June 2020), I believe that Reach received a grant of £500,000 from the DfE (an unsigned version is exhibited at JMR/07-INQ000621536). We do not hold a signed copy of the same. This funding was the first source of financial support to establish Oak and was

granted to cover Oak's essential running costs, such as the creation, hosting and maintenance of our online platform and the lesson recording equipment for teachers who were producing these on a voluntary basis. At the time of launch (and until June 2020), Oak operated through the goodwill of companies and volunteers, working alongside a small number of freelancers.

31. In addition to the funding Reach received for Oak from the DfE, we benefited from significant services and practical support that were provided free or at a significant discount due to the charitable nature of the project and the pandemic response. These free or discounted services included:

- i) Google providing Google Workspace for Education;
- ii) Cloudflare providing cybersecurity support through their Project Galileo programme;
- iii) KPMG and McKinsey & Company supplying seconded staff to assist with project management;
- iv) design agency Johnson Banks creating Oak's brand;
- v) permissions and licensing from publishers for the use of their copyrighted materials within the lesson and educational resources;
- vi) Clifford Chance providing legal advice to ensure operational and regulatory compliance; and
- vii) a number of other technology providers enabling pro-bono or heavily discounted support.

I believe that the amount of these free and discounted services provided to Oak during its first few months of existence was far in excess of the £500,000 funding received from the DfE. The Oak team was delighted and surprised to receive this breadth and generosity of support, showing the willingness of third parties to support the response to the pandemic.

32. As the pandemic progressed and we continued to produce curriculum resources to support both teachers and pupils, I believe that Reach continued to receive funding from the DfE. The sources of financial support for establishing Oak were as follows:

- i) for the period July 2020 - August 2021: £4.3 million. An unsigned copy of the grant agreement between the DfE and Reach for this period can be found at

JMR/08-INQ000621537, dated 11 September 2020;

ii) for the period September 2021 - August 2022: £5.2 million, which comprised £2.1m for 1 September 2021 - 31 March 2022, and £3.1m for 1 April 2022 - 31 August 2022. I have exhibited the grant agreement for £2.1 million, which was signed on 26 August 2021 at JMR/09-INQ000621538. There were a number of variations made to this grant, as our work progressed during that academic year (for example, the variation made in January 2022, which was signed on 24 March 2022 at JMR/10-INQ000621509 and the final variation made in August 2022 at JMR/11-INQ000621510). Oak does not hold copies of the other variations.

33. In addition, I believe that Reach received a donation of £1.8 million from the Mohn Westlake Foundation, a charitable foundation in the education and performing arts sector, which is highlighted at pages 4, 7, 41 and 42 of our Annual Report September 2020 - July 2021 at JMR/12-INQ000621511. We also benefited from:

- i) £4 million provided pro bono or at significantly reduced charges (as outlined in our Annual Report September 2020 - July 2021 at pages 45 and 48 of JMR/12-INQ000621511); and
- ii) £1m of pro bono or significantly reduced copyright and other licensing costs from copyright holders and members of the publishing industry.

34. In all aspects of our work, Oak consistently strove to deliver good value for money.

## **Part B: Delivery of remote education during the pandemic (April 2020 - August 2022)**

35. From April - July 2020 (our first term), we operated as an emergency response during the early stages of the pandemic. Through our partnerships with high-performing schools and MATs, we were able to provide curricula sequences and resources through our online platform. The curricula sequences were the content and sequence of topics to be taught by Key Stage/year group, from reception (in the Early Years Foundation Stage) and Key Stages 1 - 4 (i.e. Year 1

to Year 11). Each curriculum sequence was broken down into units and lessons.

Each lesson initially included:

- i) a starter quiz;
- ii) a pre-recorded video of a teacher teaching the lesson;
- iii) a slide deck to accompany the video lesson;
- iv) an exit quiz;
- v) worksheets (which were introduced slightly later on).

36. During this initial period, we released lessons on a rolling weekly basis onto our online platform, which we called our "Online Classroom". Each week, we released a full timetable of around 200 lessons that could be taught in a sequence. This allowed teachers to assign lessons to their class to complete remotely, allowing them to watch the video and then complete a worksheet and quizzes. As we were building our lessons on a weekly basis, all of our quizzes were formative, and we did not offer any summative assessments.

37. On 4 May 2020, we released specialist resources for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This work was led by Karen Weispeisser MBE in collaboration with other Specialist Education and SEND experts from across the sector (details of these experts can be found on a blog from June 2020, which was written by Oak's co-founder, David Thomas "Making Oak more collaborative" (exhibited at JMR/13-INQ000621512) as well as a blog from Karen Weispeisser for 'Special Needs Jungle' (exhibited at JMR/14-INQ000621513). This curriculum covered four key areas: Communication & Language, Numeracy, Independent Living, Creative Arts, Physical Development and Therapies. This was used as a backstop remote intervention for additional therapeutic support/activities that many students receive to support their physical, emotional and educational development (for example, gross and fine motor skills, speech therapy, etc.). As well as our specialist resources, we also ensured all of our resources were accessible, including British Sign Language (BSL) interpreted lessons, considerations to colour palette/contrasts and font size, and support for screen readers and other assistive technologies throughout our webpage. We also supported pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) by ensuring our resources could be

translated into the 17 most spoken additional languages. This also included an auto-translation function into Ukrainian from early 2022 onwards.

38. From the outset, we made clear that Oak's intention and function was to provide lessons and resources without cost to teachers or pupils. We also made clear that our resources were completely optional and that schools were not obliged to use our resources. Pupils were able to access our Online Classroom where they could complete lessons remotely, as instructed by their individual teachers. During this initial period, guidance documents were also developed to support teachers, pupils and parents to use Oak's resources. This included information guides for teachers and schools, as well as pupils and parents. Examples of these guides can be found at JMR/15-INQ000621514 (for teachers and schools) and JMR/16-INQ000621515 (for pupils and parents). We continued to produce guidance documents to support teachers to use Oak's resources and created a 'support hub' of articles and blogs from September 2020 onwards. Whilst our product was designed to be used by teachers to support their classes, we know that some parents were using Oak's resources to set work for their children as schools remained closed.
39. Towards the end of our first term, we commissioned ImpactEd, an independent research organisation, to carry out an independent end-of-term evaluation of Oak to gain early insights into how our resources were being used. This was informed by the analytics data from Oak's website and the results of qualitative surveys and interviews with teachers and parents. The first evaluation was conducted during Oak's first term in operation (April 2020 to July 2020) and is exhibited at JMR/06-INQ000621535. This was the first study to demonstrate our high usage and positive impact on teachers' workload. It found that by the end of the summer term in July 2020:
- i) There had been 4.7 million visits to our website, with pupils taking part in 20 million lessons (page 7 of JMR/06-INQ000621535);
  - ii) 75% of people who use Oak were 'repeat users' (i.e. users who continued to visit Oak's site) (page 10 of JMR/06-INQ000621535);

iii) Ease of use and accessibility were the most common reasons why parents and pupils used Oak (as a result of pupils and parents not being required to log in) (page 12 of JMR/06-INQ000621535);

iv) Reduced workload and improving the quality of teaching and learning were reported by teachers as being the two biggest motivations for using Oak (page 12 of JMR/06-INQ000621535);

v) Primary lessons (Key Stages 1 and 2) were accessed the most (77%), followed by secondary lessons (Key Stages 3 and 4) (15%) and reception lessons (7%). English, maths and science lessons were the most popular, followed by French, Geography, Spanish and History (page 8 of JMR/06-INQ000621535).

40. As well as insights into how Oak's resources were being used, the "End of term report" helped us to understand what Oak could improve upon. When we realised that the pandemic was likely to continue to affect schools into the academic year starting in September 2020, we considered the feedback received from teachers in our end-of-term report, as well as from our project in the summer of 2020, and made changes to how we operated and the resources we provided. I have summarised below some of the changes we made in response to this feedback:

i) Throughout our first term, Oak had approximately 200 people working on the project. This included the senior team, plus a wider team of educators and technology specialists, who were either volunteers or paid low-bono, and who had either been furloughed by their employer or whose employer agreed to second them to the Oak project to support the national response to the pandemic. While we were grateful for the generosity of the many people we worked with, we received feedback that Oak needed to be more collaborative. This was a fair reflection given the pace at which Oak was set up. While we continued to work closely with curriculum partners to create curriculum sequences and associated lesson resources, in response to this, the range and volume of partners that we worked with significantly increased. As well as MATs, we began working with a wide range of other education organisations (all of our partners for the academic year 2020/21 are listed at pages 11 and 47 of our September 2020 - July 2021 Annual report (exhibit JMR/12-INQ000621511), as well as other experts across the education and specialist sectors. A full list of

these experts can be found on a blog from June 2020, which was written by Oak's co-founder, David Thomas, entitled "Making Oak more collaborative" (exhibited at pages 2 - 4 of JMR/13-INQ000621512).

ii) In our "End of term report" (exhibited at JMR/06-INQ000621535) we received feedback that schools wanted to be able to plan which of Oak's topics and lessons they would teach, so that they would better align with a school's own curriculum, or be taught at the right time for them and their pupils. Following this feedback, instead of continuing to create and roll out lessons on a rolling weekly basis, we worked with our partners over the summer of 2020 to ensure that nearly all of our lessons were produced in time for the start of the Autumn term in September 2020. This was a huge task over that summer period, involving around 800 people, including 500+ teachers from our curriculum partners with whom we worked to create our curriculum sequences and resources. In total, over this short period, around 10,000 lessons were created.

iii) As part of this work over the summer 2020 period, we also improved the detail, extent and sophistication of our resources, so that they covered the full requirements, contents and resources to teach each subject across a full year for all school age year groups (up to and including Year 11). These improvements meant that we were able to provide "full curriculum packages", which included not only our original lesson videos, starter and exit quizzes and worksheets, but also:

- a) a downloadable document of important supplementary curriculum information for teachers. This outlined the thinking behind the content and order of the curricula content to be taught in each subject;
- b) a transcript of the teacher teaching the lesson in a video;
- c) coverage of all compulsory national curriculum subjects from reception (in the Early Years Foundation Stage) up to and including Key Stage 4 (i.e. up to Year 11);
- d) coverage of a small number of non-national curriculum subjects, such as Latin and drama.

iv) Our resources were designed to exemplify, as far as possible, the curriculum and lessons that a pupil would be taught if they were in school and in this way, from summer 2020, Oak provided what is known in the education sector as a "full curriculum package". Our starter quizzes are designed to check a pupil's prior knowledge before the main lesson starts; our video lessons are recorded by

experienced teachers who teach pupils the content of that particular lesson; once a pupil has watched the video lesson, they should then be able to complete a worksheet based on the knowledge or skills acquired as a result; at the end of the lesson, pupils can complete an exit quiz to demonstrate their understanding and alert the teacher to any misconceptions. Where necessary, adaptations were made to lessons to allow for maximum at-home participation. For example, Physical Education and Design and Technology resources were adapted to ensure that materials that could be found around the home could be used to participate in the lesson. As I have set out above, our coverage was of all compulsory national curriculum subjects, but in addition, Oak provided some lessons in non-national curriculum subjects, such as Latin and drama. We did not provide lessons or resources for Key Stage 5 or phonics programmes (for the Early Years Foundation Stage and/or Key Stage 1). I believe that this was largely because, at Key Stage 5, many pupils were already able to access a range of asynchronous resources to support their self-directed learning. For phonics, I believe that the DfE had already funded the development of fully-resourced phonics provision from DfE-approved providers, which were available for teachers and pupils to use.

v) As well as coverage of all national curriculum compulsory subjects, we developed pastoral resources. This included Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) resources for reception, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, as well as Relationships, Sex and Health Education and citizenship resources for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. We also developed a range of resources for careers week, mental health week and a virtual library. These resources were developed in partnership with a range of organisations, such as BAFTA, Jamie's Farm, Scouts, Place2Be and the National Literacy Trust, who offered their support pro bono. As well as additional pastoral resources, we also provided regular assemblies on our platform. In partnership with the Times Educational Supplement, prominent guests were invited to attend and take part in these assemblies, including the Duchess of Cambridge, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Professor Robert Winston and the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Screenshots showing all of the guests who took part in assemblies can be seen at JMR/17-INQ000621516 and JMR/18-INQ000621517. This again demonstrated

the breadth of support and generosity we received from across all sectors, and the willingness to support our response to the pandemic.

vi) Until the summer of 2020, all of our lessons and resources had been available to teachers and pupils through our Online Classroom. Following feedback from teachers in our “End of term report”, we created an additional area on our platform, which was tailored to the needs of teachers. This was known as our “Teacher Hub”. This area allowed teachers to download our lesson slides and worksheets, which they could then edit and adapt to produce their own lesson plans, and which were appropriate to the needs of their own pupils. Our “Teacher Hub”, which contained 40,000+ resources by September 2020, was essential to allow teachers to continue to benefit from our resources as the pandemic progressed, giving them the flexibility to use our resources for in-class teaching (when pupils were able to return to the classroom) and allowing them to adapt our resources to meet the needs of their individual classes. From September 2020 onwards, regular, free-to-attend webinars to better support teachers were also developed to give further support to teachers planning for the term ahead. These were attended by over 40,000 teachers (as shown at page 14 of JMR/12-INQ000621511). As outlined in paragraph 40 iii) above, we also developed a downloadable document of important supplementary curriculum information for teachers, which outlined the thinking behind the content and order of the curriculum contents to be taught in each subject.

41. As well as all of the work to improve our resources from September 2020 onwards, over the summer of 2020, we also provided a “Summer Learning Support offer”. This provided resources and lessons for face-to-face summer schools and home learning for teachers, pupils and parents. This included “priority” units and lessons identified in core subjects (maths, English and science) and were developed with support from our curriculum partners to help prepare pupils for the Autumn term 2020. We also developed formative “unit quizzes” to assist teachers and parents in identifying gaps in knowledge, alongside a product feature to allow pupils to share results directly with their teachers. I refer the Inquiry to page 32 of JMR/12-INQ000621511.

42. Following the production of curriculum sequences and lessons over the summer 2020 period, between September 2020 to August 2022, the team working for Oak was reduced to a core team of approximately 35, who were all employed and paid for from our funding. All teachers who previously created resources for us during the July and August 2020 period were paid from our funding, although during that period, we were also reliant on a number of volunteers across our teams, as well as a pro-bono team from KPMG. From September 2020 (up to August 2022), Oak colleagues continued to manage our ongoing relationships with our curriculum partners, whose teachers continued to provide support as needed (and were paid for doing so). This included, for example, making improvements or changes to our full curriculum packages in response to feedback, or delivering webinars for teachers.
43. We also worked hard to ensure that all pupils, wherever they were accessing our platform, whether that be at school or studying from home, had access to our content. In Autumn 2020, we embarked on a project to “zero-rate” Oak’s educational content. This would allow children with no broadband access at home to access Oak’s platform using a mobile phone without it counting against their data allowance or costing them money. This was extremely important to us, as evidence from Ofcom at the time showed that up to nearly one million children could only access the internet through 3/4G, and half a million children had no access at all. This research is mentioned in our briefing to the DfE “Digital Divide and Zero-rating Oak” in October 2021 (exhibited at JMR/19-INQ000621518). Oak’s own data also showed that our resources were being used disproportionately by pupils from low-income communities (shown at page 27 of JMR/12-INQ000621511). I recall that between Autumn 2020 to January 2021, we worked with high-profile mobile network operators to zero-rate Oak’s content. After weeks of negotiation, 11 operators agreed in principle, on the condition that all content and requests were served from a subdomain of thenational.academy. This was a considerable task. The vast majority of websites and applications contained requests to third-party domains, and Oak’s 10,000 different lessons featured embedded activities, quizzes, Google Forms and Slides, analytics tools and videos, which were all served by third parties. Oak’s small tech team was fortunate to have, in my view, some of the most able software engineers in the

country, so they undertook to rebuild significant parts of the Oak site so all traffic was served from its own domain.

44. In January 2021, Oak was then able to provide 11 mobile network operators with a guarantee that all content was routed through one apex domain where all its subdomains could be zero-rated. At the time, Ofcom waived the rules on net neutrality to allow this to proceed, but only on the basis that it was an emergency pandemic response. Without this, the networks would not have proceeded.
45. This technical approach to zero-rating also made it easier for school IT administrators to guarantee access to Oak's content for pupils through their content filters by allow-listing a single apex domain.
46. During the 2020/21 academic year, we continued to see significant use of our resources. Our aims for that academic year were clearly set out in our Annual Report for that year at pages 8 - 10 of JMR/12-INQ000621511 and were:
- i) to create a comprehensive, collaborative and high quality curriculum;
  - ii) to give all teachers and pupils access to good lessons - inside and outside of the classroom - no matter their circumstances;
  - iii) to deliver impact as a lean organisation that provides value-for-money to the education sector.

I believe that Oak remained extremely valuable to many schools and teachers, both for online learning (when schools were fully or partially closed) and in-class use (when schools were open). This was most evident during the period when schools were again closed in January 2021. Between January and March 2021 (i.e. during the second lockdown), an average of 2.5 million pupils (roughly over 25% of all pupils in England) were using our Online Classroom (page 22 of JMR/12-INQ000621511), and over 900,000 pupils and teachers used Oak on our peak day (page 22 of JMR/12-INQ000621511). The spike in usage during this time demonstrated Oak's value to teachers, pupils and parents when the majority of schools were closed. It also showed the platform's resilience and ability to rapidly scale in supporting a significant volume of traffic from users.

47. As we recognised the importance of evaluating Oak's usage and impact to understand how we could iterate and continuously improve our resources, we continued to commission ImpactEd to conduct independent evaluations of Oak. ImpactEd's independent evaluation for the 2020/21 academic year (September 2020 - July 2021) (exhibited at JMR/20-INQ000621520) showed that:
- i) pupils took part in 110 million lessons (page 14 of JMR/20-INQ000621520), thereby totalling 130 million lessons from April 2020 to the end of the 2020/21 academic year;
  - ii) teachers downloaded a total of 885,000 resources (lesson slides and worksheets) (page 14 of JMR/20-INQ000621520);
  - iii) 56% of teachers in England used Oak between January and June 2021 (page 262 of JMR/20-INQ000621520), and it was used in 54.1% of all state schools in England (page 16 of JMR/20-INQ000621520);
  - iv) almost three quarters of Oak users rated the quality of both Oak's curriculum sequencing and structure and curriculum content as high or very high (page 32 of JMR/20-INQ000621520);
  - v) English, maths and science were the most popular subjects, accounting for over 70% of Oak's usage. 61% of Oak's total usage was Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 (with Key Stage 2 making up a large proportion of this). Secondary schools made up 39% of the total usage, with Key Stage 3 used more frequently than Key Stage 4 (page 16 of JMR/20-INQ000621520);
  - vi) The report showed that Oak was used more in 'Social Mobility Coldspots' (i.e. the worst performing 20 percent of authorities), with 58.7% of teachers reporting usage compared to 54.1% of teachers in 'Social Mobility Hotspots' (i.e. the best performing 20 percent of authorities) (see page 16 of JMR/20-INQ000621520).
48. ImpactEd's independent evaluation for the 2020-21 academic year (exhibited at JMR/20-INQ000621520) also demonstrated Oak's (initially unintended) impact beyond remote education usage and showed positive impact on curriculum and lesson planning, workload reduction and wellbeing. For example, it found that:
- i) 61% of teachers using Oak's resources reported that it had saved them time. They also reported that our resources had a notable impact on the amount of time they spent planning and resourcing lessons, allowing them more time to

focus on identifying and supporting more vulnerable pupils during lockdown (page 19 of JMR/20-INQ000621520);

ii) Teachers who used Oak had a statistically significant higher well-being score than teachers who did not use Oak (page 24 of JMR/20-INQ000621520);

iii) 72% of teachers who used Oak's resources reported that it had improved the quality of their remote lesson delivery, while over half (56%) said that it had helped improve the quality of their in-person teaching. 58% also said that Oak's resources helped improve in-person lesson planning (pages 29 - 30 of JMR/20-INQ000621520);

iv) 88% of teachers using Oak said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the learning experience that Oak provides for their pupils. When asked what proportion of the pupils they taught were 'behind', 'on-track' or 'exceeding expectations', 22% of Oak users, compared to 16% of non-Oak users, reported pupils exceeding expectations (pages 34 - 35 of JMR/20-INQ000621520).

49. At the end of the 2020/21 academic year following discussion with DfE, on 22 July 2021, Oak announced to the press and via our website that it would stay open for the 2021/22 academic year ("We're staying open and free into next year" - which is exhibited at JMR/21-INQ000621521). This was to enable Oak to continue to provide a remote education contingency in the event of further lockdowns and school closures, and to support the new uses that teachers had fully embraced, in particular, using Oak to support lesson and curriculum planning whilst long-term plans were finalised. During this period, many schools had reopened to the majority of pupils. Whilst usage of our resources did slightly decline from our peak in 2020, we found that many were increasingly using Oak to support curriculum and lesson planning and delivery in the classroom. This is shown in ImpactEd's second annual independent evaluation of Oak, conducted over the 2021/22 academic year. This extends beyond the Specified Period as it covers September 2021 to July 2022. This is exhibited at JMR/22-INQ000621522. While in-class use became increasingly common, Oak's resources were still heavily used for remote learning, where pupils were absent from schools. For example, usage of our resources spiked after the Christmas 2021 break when the Covid-19 Omicron variant intensified (meaning increased pupil and staff absences from school) and when Storm Eunice forced several

schools to close in the Southern parts of the country (on or around 18 February 2022) (shown at page 4 of JMR/22-INQ000621522). This shows that Oak was still being used extensively to support emergency remote education provision. The evaluation by ImpactEd for the 2021/22 academic year (exhibited at JMR/22-INQ000621522) found that:

- i) An average of 32,000 teachers and 170,000 pupils continued to use Oak's resources each week. Around 16.7 million lessons were taken (page 15 of JMR/22-INQ000621522);
- ii) Nearly half (42%) of teachers who use our resources said that it had saved them time, by a median average of 3 hours per week (page 23 JMR/22-INQ000621522);
- iii) Teachers who use Oak's resources have statistically significant higher well-being than those who do not. They were also more likely to see themselves as staying in education than those who do not use Oak (page 28 JMR/22-INQ000621522);
- iv) Over 60% of teachers who use Oak reported that the quality of our curriculum sequencing and structure and curriculum content is high. They also reported that Oak's curriculum and resources have increased their confidence in curriculum design (50%), the quality of their lesson planning (46%) and delivery (48%), and the quality of their school's curriculum (47%) (page 33 of JMR/22-INQ000621522);
- v) Teachers who use Oak were over 35% more likely to report that over 20% of their pupils were exceeding expectations compared to teachers who do not use Oak. This appeared to be linked to the additional time Oak allows teachers to spend focusing on individual pupils' needs, assessment and subject knowledge, and the structure of our resources (page 40 of JMR/22-INQ000621522);
- vi) English, maths and science were again the most used subjects, comprising 64% of total use. Key Stage 3 was the most frequently used Key Stage, followed by Key Stage 2, Key Stage 4, Key Stage 1 and Early Years Foundation Stage (page 18 of JMR/22-INQ000621522).

50. As with our end-of-term evaluation "End of term report: Insights and Reflections from Oak's First Term" (JMR/06-INQ000621535), we carefully considered the feedback and insights from ImpactEd's independent evaluations for both the

2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years (JMR/20-INQ000621520 and JMR/22-INQ000621522) to understand how we could improve our resources going forward. As these evaluations identified Oak's impact beyond remote education usage, we began to think about how to improve our resources for use in the classroom. Further details on how we improved our resources in response to this feedback can be found in paragraphs 63-66 of this witness statement.

### **Part C: Online Safety**

51. From the outset, safeguarding and online safety have been central to the design and delivery of Oak's products and services. These principles were embedded from the first set of resources developed by the organisation. The following measures were implemented by Oak, guided by training provided by the NSPCC, to ensure a high standard of safety for all users and to reduce any safeguarding issues potentially arising from the use of online learning:

- i) All lesson videos are pre-recorded. There have been no livestreamed lessons or lessons delivered via video call, thereby eliminating real-time contact and associated safeguarding risks associated with livestreamed lessons. All lessons were served on platforms with no advertising;
- ii) A rigorous quality assurance programme was established, led by educational experts and qualified teachers. This programme ensured that our lessons met strict safety and educational standards prior to publication. Details of this process were included in training materials provided to teachers creating lessons (safeguarding training is at JMR/23-INQ000621523 and quality assurance training is at JMR/24-INQ000621524) and explained publicly in an FAQ article 'How are lessons checked for quality?' (exhibited at JMR/25-INQ000621525);
- iii) The platform was originally designed so that no personal information was required to be collected or shared through the site, maintaining the privacy and anonymity of all users, including pupils. Google Analytics data was anonymised prior to collection. Whilst teachers are able to provide their email addresses for marketing purposes, this remains optional. Teachers, pupils and parents were never required to create an account and log in to access any resources. This meant that personal information, such as the circumstances and characteristics of individual pupils, e.g. their age, stage of education (beyond identifying the year

group / Key Stage of resources they were accessing), extent of parental support, and physical setting, was not collected by Oak;

iv) The platform has excluded all external links. Users are not directed to any third-party platforms, reducing the risk of children and young people's exposure to harmful online material alongside their use of remote learning platforms;

v) Some lessons also provide guidance to teachers on how to approach and deliver sensitive topics in a safe, age-appropriate, and responsible manner.

52. In one isolated incident, an error in the subtitling process resulted in an inaccurate transcription, which included an inappropriate swear word. We were notified by a user, but given no information about where the error was to be found. The error was located within the same working day. The video was immediately taken offline, corrected, and re-uploaded, with internal protocols reviewed to mitigate the risk of the same happening again. This incident led to Oak commissioning a piece of work to increase the reliability of our caption providers, which resulted in significantly fewer errors and greater confidence in our captioning service. It is worth noting that, during this time, Oak had approximately 250,000 minutes of transcribed video content at a 99% accuracy rate. We used human transcription instead of automated AI to ensure accuracy and quality.

53. Oak has always had a designated safeguarding lead to consider and assess any safeguarding issues potentially arising from the use of online learning. Safeguarding is also reviewed regularly as part of the risk management process. A safeguarding statement was first added to our platform in April 2020, which explained that Oak had appropriate policies and processes in place, but that teachers should continue to follow the safeguarding policies and procedures of the educational institution to which they and their students belonged (see JMR/26-INQ000621526). As such, I consider that Oak has, and continues to be, very effective at managing any safeguarding risks, and the measures it has introduced to mitigate any such risks have been highly effective (as demonstrated by there being only one incident in the Specified Period).

**Part D: Oak today (September 2022 onwards)**

54. Between March 2022 and September 2022, the DfE led work to establish Oak as an ALB. Oak was initially incorporated as FCNDPB Limited on 15 June 2022 and became Oak National Academy Limited on 1 September 2022. I have exhibited Oak's Articles of Association at JMR/27-INQ000621527.
55. As an ALB, our purpose is to work with schools, teachers, and the wider education system to create, develop and support the use of free, optional, high-quality full curriculum packages that are available to teachers and pupils through a robust, accessible digital education platform. As we moved away from the pandemic and our resources were increasingly used for in-class use as well as remote education, we renewed our objectives to better support teachers and pupils. Our objectives are therefore to:
- i) Provide a national contingency for remote education where needed in the event of school disruption. I believe that prior to April 2020, no such provision was available, and therefore, the government wanted to ensure that Oak continued to be available should any local or national need emerge in future.
  - ii) Support teachers to reduce their workload. Evidence in our independent evaluations (for example, ImpactEd's Evaluation report for the academic year 2021/22, page 23 of JMR/22-INQ000621522) has enabled teachers who use our resources to reduce their workload, as we have supported them with high-quality curriculum and lesson resources, where needed.
  - iii) Support teachers to improve their curriculum expertise by exemplifying high-quality curriculum practice. I believe that Oak's resources have provided teachers with examples and models of high-quality curriculum resources, to improve their ability to design and deliver their own curriculum (for example, this is shown in ImpactEd's Evaluation report for the academic year 2021/22 at page 33 of JMR/22-INQ000621522).
56. All of our resources created during the pandemic were developed at a significant pace. This was to ensure that teachers and pupils were given a range of curriculum resources across all subjects and Key Stages, as quickly as possible. While we are extremely grateful for all of the support we received to achieve this

immense feat during those first few months of the pandemic, we recognised that the quality of some resources was variable. To improve this, Oak is now re-developing, through commissioning new schools, education organisations and publishers, full curriculum packages for Key Stages 1-4 (i.e. the curriculum sequence and lesson resources). This has allowed for improvements to their quality and for them to be updated to reflect changes to curriculum choices since 2020. Our new resources include exactly the same component elements (i.e. curriculum sequences and associated lesson resources, including a starter quiz, a video of a teacher teaching the lesson, accompanying slides, an exit quiz and worksheets). All of our resources continue to be available to pupils through a digital platform tailored to their needs (i.e. our “Online Classroom”) and with teachers through the “Teacher Area.” All of our resources continue to be completely free and optional for teachers and pupils to use.

57. Oak's remit also underwent some minor changes once it was established as an ALB. This included reducing it so that Oak can no longer create full curriculum packages for pupils who attend special schools, alternative provision, and pupil referral units, early years and reception pupils, and non-national curriculum subjects (for example, Latin and drama).
58. As of the date of this witness statement, we are over halfway through releasing our new, re-developed curriculum resources. In Autumn 2024, all of our curriculum sequences and associated lesson resources in English, maths, science, history and primary geography were published. We also released all of our curriculum sequences in art & design, computing, design & technology, modern foreign languages, music, Physical Education, Religious Education, secondary geography and citizenship. All of the associated lesson resources for this second batch of subjects are now being rolled out over this current academic year (2024/25). We have so far released around 61% of this second batch of lessons.
59. In order to maximise their public benefit, all of our curricula and lesson resources are available on an Open Government Licence (OGL) and are free for anyone to use and adapt. This is in line with the UNESCO 2019 recommendation on Open

Educational Resources (OER) to which the UK is a signatory. This means that anyone (for example, teachers, schools or commercial organisations) have complete freedom to edit and adapt our resources, and allows education organisations to innovate and create aligned or derivative products or services, such as high-quality textbooks or training offers. By Autumn 2025, we will have therefore produced what we believe is the first openly-licensed, fully resourced model implementation of the national curriculum, down to the lesson level.

60. In September 2024, Oak also released an AI-lesson assistant, Aila. I believe this is the first generative AI product to be released for use by the general population by a central government public body. Aila uses Oak's underlying curricula and resources, alongside generative AI, to support teachers in adapting and producing high quality lessons.
61. We continue to commission annual evaluations of our usage and impact. The most recent evaluation report by ImpactED for the academic year 2023/24 (exhibited at JMR/28-INQ000621528) shows that:
- i) Over one in three teachers use Oak, with use growing by 115% compared to the same period in the previous year. An average of 52,000 pupils use Oak each week (excluding school holidays), and around 7.2 million lessons were taken (page 13 of JMR/28-INQ000621528);
  - ii) Three-quarters of teachers who use our resources report a positive impact on their workload. On average, they report working almost 5 hours less per week (page 20 of JMR/28-INQ000621528);
  - iii) Teachers who use Oak say they have better well-being and are more likely to want to stay in teaching than those teachers who do not use Oak (page 20 of JMR/28-INQ000621528);
  - iv) Data on daily pupil activity showed a weekly cycle of around 28,000 lessons taken a day (page 13 of JMR/28-INQ000621528);
  - v) We continue to have a specific focus on disadvantage, with around 20% extra use in schools serving communities facing the highest disadvantage (pages 14 - 15 of JMR/28-INQ000621528);

vi) Teachers widely felt that Oak provided valuable support for circumstances such as cover, sickness and exclusions and helped to minimise learning gaps for pupils in these circumstances (page 4 of JMR/28-INQ000621528);

In addition, our research shows that our AI-lesson assistant, Aila, saves teachers between 1 and 15 hours per week. The blog from our User Researcher, dated 13 February 2025, entitled “How is Aila impacting teacher lesson planning practices, workload and expertise? Early insights from the classroom”, which sets out the impact of Aila, is exhibited at JMR/29-INQ000621529.

62. All of our new, re-developed resources are used in our “Teacher Area” (to support in-class lesson planning and delivery) and our pupil area (i.e. our “Online Classroom”) to support remote learning. While our main use case has shifted towards curriculum and lesson planning and delivery in the classroom since we were established as an ALB, Oak continues to be used extensively when there is widespread disruption. For example, ImpactEd’s annual evaluation of Oak for 2022/23 showed that there were large spikes in pupil usage during teacher strikes on the 1 February, 1 March, 15 March, 27 April, 2 May and 5 July 2023 (shown at page 16 of exhibit JMR/30-INQ000621531). As well as this, in ImpactEd’s most recent annual evaluation of Oak for 2023/24, pupils using Oak in the South of England increased by over 200% during Storm Ciaran in November 2023, when the majority of schools were closed (shown on pages 13-14 of JMR/28-INQ000621528).

## **Part E: Lessons Learned**

63. Oak’s approach from the very start was highly agile and iterative. The pace at which the organisation came to be established required clear focus and prioritisation as we aimed to deliver as much value as possible to teachers, pupils and parents. We were consistently focused on responding to the highest priority user needs. During this early period, we focused on building our online product and resources quickly, given the widespread need for remote education support across the sector, with the understanding that our products, including our resources, would not be perfect and would need continual iteration and improvement.

64. As outlined in paragraph 39 of this witness statement, we commissioned ImpactEd to evaluate Oak's usage during our first term in operation (April - July 2020) to understand how we could iterate and improve our resources (see our End of Term Report at JMR/06-INQ000621535). This led to a considerable number of changes (outlined in paragraph 40 above) which included increasing the extent, sophistication and detail of both of our resources and online platform. Early on, we recognised the importance of consistently reflecting our approach, seeking feedback from our users and making the necessary improvements in response. This continued to be a core pillar of Oak's approach throughout the pandemic, and with each independent evaluation that ImpactEd conducted on Oak.

65. I believe that Oak's agile approach and start-up culture were key to Oak's success during the pandemic. This allowed us to deliver our curriculum resources at pace, whilst ensuring we were able to rapidly adapt and improve our resources following feedback. We pivoted the product a number of times as the requirements changed throughout the pandemic; initially as a remote-only product with a fixed timetable, then building all curricula resources and a "Teacher Hub" to support a more hybrid approach as the "bubble" system meant that some pupils were in school, and others at home.

66. We maintain this agile approach to this day, but now operate at a more sustainable pace, and have made a range of further improvements to our resources and platform since September 2022. This is outlined in further detail in paragraphs 54-60 of this witness statement.

67. As our data shows that Oak's pupil usage peaks when there is widespread disruption or school closures (see for example, our usage during extreme weather when schools are closed as explained in paragraph 62 above), I believe that Oak would play a critical role in the event of a future pandemic, helping teachers provide high-quality remote education for pupils. I believe that Oak's impact would be even more significant in the event of a future pandemic, as we have re-developed all of our resources since 2020 to improve their quality and in

response to teacher feedback. As well as this, the development of our AI-lesson assistant Aila gives teachers greater opportunity to edit and adapt Oak's resources to suit them and their pupils' needs. Oak will continue to operate as an emergency remote education backstop and provider of free, optional, and high-quality curriculum and teaching resources. Pupils will continue to be able to access our resources in suitable formats where they can complete lessons remotely, as instructed by their individual teachers. This is part of our core purpose. The DfE, in its non-statutory guidance 'Providing remote education: guidance for schools' (exhibited as JMR/31-INQ000621532), also references Oak's video lessons as a helpful tool to support teachers with remote learning (as shown at page 7 of JMR/31-INQ000621532).

68. I believe that the pandemic forced every school in the country to set up remote education provision to ensure pupils continued to learn during lockdown. This process has encouraged schools to think hard about the technology they use and their remote learning offer. I believe most schools have since made improvements to their plans to shift to remote learning, should it be needed in the future. While schools should remain autonomous and responsible for developing their own remote learning provision, Oak's emergency remote education offer should be clearly signposted by the government as optional support for teachers and pupils, if needed.

69. Furthermore, the use of AI tools in education has significantly increased over recent months and is likely to change the landscape of education and education technology in future. It is imperative that, in the event of a future pandemic, the government thinks carefully about the quality and safety of AI-enabled technology in supporting remote education to avoid creating unintended consequences, such as widening the disadvantage gap. As a public body, Oak has worked to the highest quality and safety standards when developing our AI-lesson planning assistant. I believe that the DfE should support schools to make informed choices about which AI-enabled technologies are safe, accessible and high-quality for use in the classroom, as well as at home when learning remotely.

## **Part F: Conclusion**

70. Finally, I believe that the creation of Oak represents a considerable achievement during a time of great national need. It reflects the hard work, dedication and generosity of people across all sectors - from education to government, publishing, business and technology. I believe that Oak was, and continues to be, excellent value for money, with a total cost to government during the period from April 2020 to 28 June 2022 of approximately £10 million.
71. During the pandemic, we operated efficiently and effectively, consistently iterating and improving our curriculum support offer to meet the needs of the greatest number of teachers and pupils. As shown in Oak's independent evaluations, we consistently maintained high usage during the pandemic with over 145 million lessons taken between April 2020 and August 2022, and had a significantly positive impact on teacher workload and curriculum expertise. Where there was no national, asynchronous remote education support offer before 2020, Oak has now been established, and continues to be the country's remote education backstop for any future local or national disruption.
72. Today, Oak has a significantly positive impact on teachers, supporting them to reduce their workload and improve their curriculum expertise. We continually look for ways to support the education sector and became the first public sector organisation to launch a generative AI product for use by the general population. Our newly developed resources are now used by more than one in three teachers. While the adverse impact of the pandemic cannot be overstated, I believe the creation of Oak stands as a testament to what can be achieved through a collective national effort to support those in greatest need.

## **Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false

statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

**Personal Data**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dated:** 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025