



Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Dear RUGS,

I would like to say thank you to all of you for writing to me and sending such a range of interesting questions. I hope that Felicity is going to give you some good answers when she meets you today, but I'd like to reply to some of the questions you asked about my role and how I feel about it.

First though, I want to say how important I think it is for children and young people to get involved in the big issues that affect their lives. We need to hear what you think about issues including education, mental health, careers, safety and wellbeing, and what makes for a happy childhood. So I was really pleased to see your questions and to know that you are talking about the things that matter to you the most.

You asked me about the job that I do as Minister for Children and Families. I am responsible for a very wide range of policies that impact on children, for example:

- making sure children get the right support and education in the early years before they start school;
- making sure that children are safe wherever they are, at home and at school;
- making sure that when their parents can't look after them, children are found safe and loving homes; and
- making sure that children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities get the support they need.

That all adds up to a very busy job, but one that I love. You asked me some great questions about being minister and how I feel about my job:

Why did I choose to become a minister?

My family arrived in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s to escape a tyrant dictator called Saddam Hussein. When we talk about freedom and opportunity, they are not just words to my family, they literally define our lives. 'Freedom' because in the country we came from, Iraq, there was no freedom to think. You had to belong to a single party or you were thrown in jail. And 'opportunity' because this was confined to those who the dictator favoured. The United Kingdom allowed me to get a brilliant education, go to a fantastic school, set up a business and become a Member of Parliament. I wanted to become a Minister to give something back to the country that gave me everything.

What I would be doing if I didn't have this job?

I would continue to represent the people of Stratford-on-Avon as their Member of Parliament. I am very proud to have been elected to represent this historic constituency that gave birth to the world's greatest poet and playwright - William Shakespeare, the son of Stratford.

Is my job is hard?

Being a Minister is hard work. It is hugely challenging but I think I have the best job in the Department for Education, or even Government. Working as Minister for Children and Families is probably the most fulfilling job I've ever done in my life.

What have I learned from my job?

I have learned so much. From Opportunity Areas (like Stoke-in-Trent) in particular, I have learned that it is so important to work together with local people, and to let local people decide the best way to improve education and opportunities for the young people in their area.

What do I like best about my job?

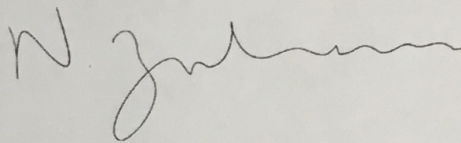
I like being able to make a real difference to people's lives. For example, I met a family in Staffordshire recently who are benefitting from the Government's offer of 30 hours of free childcare a week for working parents of three and four year old children. Both of the parents I met work shifts in Tesco; they told me how they used to meet in the car park between their shifts to hand over their son to the other parent, and how our free childcare offer has allowed them to spend more quality time together as a family now. They told me that their son's confidence and speech has grown so much since going to nursery. Hearing stories like this one helps to make my job so rewarding.

You also asked if I've ever been to Stoke and whether I think your city is important. I do think it's very important – that's why we've chosen Stoke-on-Trent to be one of our 12 Opportunity Areas. Your city has an amazing heritage – everyone knows about the potteries – and it's still a centre for innovation, creativity and partnership. You have some really important big businesses in the city, like Michelin, and Stoke-on-Trent is also recognised as one of the best places in the country to start up a new business. The recent work on the City of Culture bid showed just how strong the arts and creative industries are in the city, and how people in Stoke can work together.

All of that is wonderful, but at the same time not all children and young people are getting the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. That's why we're working with local schools, employers and other organisations through the Opportunity Area – to make sure we get things right in Stoke.

The Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, came to the city in February, on the day the Opportunity Area Delivery Plan was published. He went to a primary school and talked to children and teachers there, as well as meeting young people at the YMCA and talking to employers. I haven't been to the city yet – but I hope to visit soon!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'N. Zahawi', with a stylized, flowing script.

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