

## Education Committee

Oral evidence: [The future of post-16 qualifications](#),  
HC 902

Wednesday 30 March 2022

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Caroline Ansell; Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Anna Firth; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Ian Mearns; Angela Richardson.

Questions 1-40

### Witnesses

**I:** Rt Hon. Lord Baker of Dorking and Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Special Adviser on Education Policy to the Secretary-General, OECD.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Baker and Andreas Schleicher.

**Q1 Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for coming to our Committee today. I should make a declaration of interest that I am honorary co-chair of the Baker Dearing Educational Trust, a UTC policy group chaired by Lord Baker. I am also a member of the Times Education Commission. Are you happy with first names, or would you like to be addressed by your titles?

**Lord Baker:** No, no; call me Kenneth.

**Andreas Schleicher:** Andreas is okay.

**Q2 Chair:** Thank you. It is good to see you again. For the benefit of the tape, could you both introduce yourselves to those watching?

**Lord Baker:** Thank you for inviting me back to the Committee. The last time I spoke to it was 37 years ago, when it had just been established following Norman St John-Stevs's reforms that set up a Select Committee for each Department. I think this Committee held me more to account than the House of Commons did. When I got the approval of the Cabinet under Margaret Thatcher for a national curriculum, I had to announce it. I didn't leak it—that is unusual today. I did not even tell the House of Commons. I came to this Committee and announced one morning that we were going to have a national curriculum. I think they were flabbergasted, but it shows the respect I held for your Committee.

**Q3 Chair:** Thank you. Mr Schleicher, could you introduce yourself, please?

**Andreas Schleicher:** I am Andreas Schleicher, director for education and skills. I have been a quite regular guest at this Committee, which shows the interest there is in the UK in the comparative perspective.

**Q4 Chair:** Without this turning to a love-in, I am a huge fan of both of you. Mr Schleicher, when you last appeared before the Committee in February 2019 to give evidence in our inquiry on the fourth industrial revolution, you told us that on average, the English system is "okay" compared to its peers. You said that the greatest weaknesses in UK schools for children at the age of 15 were in "non-routine analytical skills", which are increasingly in demand from employers.

What exactly did you mean by that? What kind of skills and knowledge will young people today most need to have successful and fulfilling careers in the future? From what age should we start to change the curriculum to better prepare students for the world of work? I will get both of you to answer, but I will start off with Andreas.

**Lord Baker:** Yes, the Government are committed to improving technical education—there is no question about that—but they believe that technical education should start at 16. I don't agree with that. The Select Committee on Youth Unemployment in the House of Lords took evidence



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

from industry, schools, colleges, parents and unemployed youngsters. They all said that they left college at 18 with very few employability skills. When we probed them and asked what employability skills they wanted, the first thing nearly all of them said was problem solving—the capacity to really solve problems logically. Secondly, they wanted people to have experience of working in teams; thirdly, they wanted people to engage in creativity; and fourthly, they wanted people to improve their communication, which they called oracy. None of those things feature in the 11 to 16-year-old education in our country today.

In all the secondary schools in your constituencies, you will find that most have to follow Progress 8 and EBacc—a curriculum imposed upon the education system by Michael Gove in 2010-11. I think that is a big mistake, because it narrows the education of 11 to 16-year-olds to academic subjects. As a result, you have had a dramatic drop in design technology teaching—80% since 2010—and a 40% drop in the cultural subjects of music, performing arts, drama, music and art, just when there is a huge demand for those people as a result of streaming, Netflix and all the rest of it. There are huge opportunities. I am very glad to say that at the colleges I have set up, one is at Elstree, which is next to the studios, one is at Pinewood, which is next to studios, and one is at Salford Quays, next to the television studios. They are all producing youngsters for these industries. No other schools in the country are really doing this.

I believe that a fundamental change has to be made to the curriculum of our schools. I have now identified seven major reports that have been received in the past six months that have said that. The first one is by the high mistress of St Paul's—probably the best headmistress in the country. She had 750 responses, half from the public sector. Her conclusion was that the curriculum is no longer fit for purpose. There was the report on youth unemployment from the House of Lords Select Committee, which said that the curriculum needed a total recalibration, and two former Education Secretaries were on that Committee—myself and Ken Clarke. We called for Progress 5—that is to say, five academic subjects: English, maths, two sciences and data skills. All schools should have the choice of either that or Progress 8.

You may just remember that as part of the reforms I introduced, I gave a right to parents to vote whether their school should be part of a local authority or not, and elections were held. I believe that you should increase the choice of parents by giving them the choice, together with their teachers, whether they want their child at 11 to go to a Progress 5 or Progress 8 school, quite frankly. That is the proposal that I made.

Of the other five reports, one was from ResPublica and one was from Pearson itself, which has said very clearly that there should be a change in the curriculum—and it has a big interest in defending the present system, if you think of its revenue. There was also a report from Education Media Centre, which called for an end to cliff-edge examinations at 16. I was going to ask Andreas a question, because I think that we are the only country in Europe that now has life-changing exams at 16, because GCSEs



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

are life-opportunity exams—there is no question about that. I think we are the only country in Europe that has such exams. We just do not have enough—

**Chair:** Okay. I am going to bring in—

**Lord Baker:** I am going on a bit long, I'm afraid. May I just say one more thing?

**Chair:** Very quickly.

**Lord Baker:** Employers also said to us that they need youngsters at 18 with data skills. We just do not have them. If you go to schools in your constituencies, you will find that from 11 to 16, computing is hardly taught. Only about 11% of students do computing and go for the computer science GCSE at 16, which is a very academic exam. Since the IT GCSE was abolished in 2016, there has been a drop in your schools of 43% in youngsters studying computing. I think that is antediluvian in a digital age.

Sorry I have been so long.

**Chair:** That's okay. Andreas.

**Andreas Schleicher:** When we look at our comparisons, students in Britain do relatively well when it comes to relatively short tasks relating to the reproduction of subject matter knowledge. British students have much greater difficulties in demonstrating ways of thinking and ways of working. In a world where the kinds of things that are easy to teach and to test are becoming easier to digitise and to automate, that is a significant risk. Students in Britain have quite a task, and greater difficulties in applying their knowledge and extrapolating from what they know, and using that creatively and applying their knowledge in novel situations—again, something for which there is a rise in demand. I agree with the previous list: the capacity of people to solve complex problems, to think critically, to think creatively and to work with people who are different from them. Obviously, those things are rising in importance.

Your question on when those skills are learned best is a difficult one to answer. I would say that many of those foundations are laid much earlier than we typically think. You make your most important career decisions not when you graduate from school, but when you enrol in school. That is when you decide where you put your emphasis—to what extent you take school seriously. When it comes to creative thinking and curiosity, obviously in early childhood education, children are doing much better than—

Q5 **Chair:** What does “skills” actually mean? When we say we want more skills in the curriculum, what does that mean in practice, and how would it work, apart from in primary school?

**Andreas Schleicher:** Skills are really about your capacity to apply knowledge—to use it. Knowledge is static; skills are your capacity to



deploy that knowledge. What it means in an instructional setting is that students need to have room to experiment, to do things and to learn through experience. Project-based learning environments generally are very conducive to the development of skills; worked-based environments are very important for this as well. The more we can integrate the world of work and the world of learning, the more we will get people to work on real problems, work with real people and work on things that have real consequences. That is the context in which skills are best developed.

This is not just about applied skills. In the British context, often skills are associated with low-level manual tasks. No, skills actually can be very advanced cognitive skills.

Q6 **Chair:** Lord Baker, I don't know whether you have had a chance yet to go through the schools White Paper that came out on Monday. It talks about ensuring that we have a "knowledge-rich curriculum". There was nothing about skills in that White Paper. Should it have said a skills-rich curriculum as well?

**Lord Baker:** Yes, certainly it should have done. I was surprised how modest it was, because they really were talking about the improvement of literacy and numeracy as the main point. We all agree on that. David Blunkett had a big try to improve it. I don't really agree with the idea of pushing up the standard to 5 rather than 4.5, because I think that will leave many disadvantaged students at a disadvantage.

When we were introducing T-levels in the UTCs 18 months ago—we were in the first flank of doing computing and GCSEs in one UTC—we discovered that of the 10 who started, three dropped out because they were not academically up to it, and they were people who got 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 or 1 at GCSE. I think the T-levels—we will come on to them later, no doubt—are really suited to students who get 7, 8 and 9, and not others, quite frankly.

I think the role of any Education Secretary is to concentrate on the bottom third of the students in our country today—the forgotten third, the 30% who don't get level 4 in English or maths. Frankly, there has been no improvement at all in that area since 2010. The number of disadvantaged children is today, in 2022, the same as in 2010. So this great new Gove curriculum has not improved the lot of disadvantaged students significantly. That is one of the reasons why our youth employment is double that of Germany and higher than that of most other European countries.

You need it to be skills rich, as opposed to just knowledge rich, because the purpose of education is not just to cram children with knowledge, but to teach them how to understand knowledge and how to access knowledge.

You have got to realise that kids today carry in their pockets a machine that is larger than the "Encyclopedia Britannica" or any knowledge of any teacher, and they are not taught to use it. They use it for Twitter, for Instagram, for Facebook, but they are not taught to explore all its creative



possibilities. David Hockney uses it to paint on, for example. They are not taught anything about the use of that equipment, but the breakthrough in Britain is happening in primary schools, because in primary schools you have now got quite a lot of coding clubs where they do actually code.

I have a grandson who is 13 or 14, and he has learned how to code. He is not a genius, but he has learned how to code within a year, and he loves it. At his school, which is private, they are nearly all doing GCSE computer science, and a lot of them are doing design and technology. The biggest rise in design and technology today is in private schools. Why are they doing it? Because it leads to jobs, whereas we are seeing the death of design and technology in our schools. That is appalling, I think.

Q7 **Caroline Ansell:** I just wanted to come in on that. Thank you for what you have shared.

**Lord Baker:** Could you speak a little bit louder? I would be grateful if you would.

**Caroline Ansell:** Absolutely. I just wanted to come in on the comments you were making about the curriculum. I should confess that I am a language teacher, so I feel I should make a spirited defence of the acquisition of language skills alongside digital.

**Lord Baker:** Yes, absolutely. Fair enough.

**Caroline Ansell:** But is part of the issue that you are describing perhaps associated with assessment, rather than the content of the curriculum? It is about how we assess, and perhaps that does not properly convey the skills acquisition that students have, because they do have opportunities to apply their knowledge in a whole range of contexts within school, but when it comes to the formal exams, it does tend to rest rather more on knowledge and the reproduction—as Andreas said—of factual content. Is it about assessment, rather than curriculum?

**Lord Baker:** No, because the curriculum determines the assessment. The way that we work now is that the curriculum determines exactly the method of assessment, which is a quite demanding exam at 16, sitting alone at a desk in a college.

What is interesting in assessment is that it is the universities that are beginning to change assessment. I have a grandson who last year was ending his last year at Cambridge, doing the equivalent of PPE—I can't remember what it is called. Last year, because of covid, they had no written exams at all sitting in a hall. They were all allowed to do a book exam sitting at home, doing it on their computer. That was accepted by the history faculty in Cambridge. I think they are going to continue with it, and certainly my grandson benefited from it—he got a first, so he is naturally in favour of this particular system, but he said he was able to write longer and more interesting stuff. That is a different form of assessment.



I introduced the GCSEs, and I am in favour of their being suspended. I do not think you can abolish them overnight; you've got to have an alternative, and there is a think-tank called Rethinking Assessment that is full of very intelligent people from both the public and the private sectors. The private-sector schools like Eton are all represented on it, and they are coming up with a proposal that is a combination of some written exams—probably locally based ones—with sequential examination of their progress during their years. I think that is the sort of assessment system we should move towards.

Could I just say that, in all the evidence we had in our Select Committee, there was only one person who attended to defend the curriculum and assessment? It was Nick Gibb. Industry was really strongly against it. The Nissan letter was absolute, for example: it said that the present curriculum gives no help to the manufacturing industry at all. I think there is now a mismatch between what industry and commerce want and what the education system is capable of providing.

Now, I am not saying that we should only listen to industries. Several industries say that they want linguists, you will be glad to know. It is not a question of abolishing language from it, although it is not a very popular option and the numbers taking it each year do decline, as you know. German is dropping out, and Spanish is rising. To be really frank with you, I do not believe that a foreign language should be a compulsory subject for all students today; it should be one of the choices for students. It is very difficult for students who come from a household in which English is the second language to master French irregular verbs. Even I had trouble with French irregular verbs, particularly the conditional and the subjunctive. I could not get the pronunciations right.

**Caroline Ansell:** I fear we might have strayed off into French irregular verbs.

**Chair:** Do you want to ask your question to Andreas now?

Q8 **Caroline Ansell:** Yes, absolutely. Andreas, you spoke earlier about the comparative perspective, so I am keen to understand our own system post-16, although I take your point that some of the things we are concerned about here are pre-16. How does our post-16 education compare with that of our OECD neighbours?

**Andreas Schleicher:** There are several issues. First, on the previous point, it is not right to place knowledge and skills at two opposing ends of a spectrum, because they are really two sides of the same coin. In today's world, you need knowledge, but if you cannot use it, apply it and extrapolate from it, that knowledge is not very useful. We should look at those in conjunction, which relates to the point that I am going to make now. For the post-16 population, the UK labour market does really well in extracting value from their skills. You should look very positively on the flexibility in your labour market. If you have the right skills in Britain, you certainly get a good chance to use them and to extract good value from them in terms of employment and earnings. That is a really positive side.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

According to our adult skills survey, less than 5% of British adults have better skills than they need for their current job. In one way, you can say that the skills pool that is available is fully exploited by the labour market. If you see productivity issues, they will have a lot more to do with the supply of skills than with the demand for skills. That is a really important context to keep in mind.

However, I want to make it very clear that skills do not equate to degrees. You have many post-16 people in Britain with certain qualifications that are not met by the skills they actually have. I will come back to this in a moment, but we really should talk about the capacity of people to do something, versus just having a formal qualification. Our survey of adult skills shows that you have roughly 9 million adults in England who have quite low basic skills. Five million of them are actually in work, so they are not out of the labour market but are in low-skilled jobs. It is a pretty large number of people, many of whom have a certificate but do not have the prerequisite skills.

The UK is the only country where the young people entering the workforce are no longer better skilled than their counterparts leaving for retirement. In most OECD countries, there is a significant intergenerational skills gap, whereby the older generation are quite poorly skilled but the younger generation are at the very top, whereas we can say for the UK that there is no visible skills advantage of the young people entering the labour market, which is obviously a lot more demanding when it comes to skills and advanced skills.

One point that I also want to make—it comes back to the question of when you start—is that we see very clearly that learning post-16 tends to reinforce earlier skill differentials. You can put it the other way round: those who are in greatest need of adult learning get the least out of it. For example, 49% of adults participated in job-related adult learning during the 12 months previous to the survey, so basically 50% did something in terms of lifelong learning. That is a good number, and it puts the UK in the middle of OECD countries. But that share drops to 28% for low-skilled adults, so that people with low skills have only about half of the participation rate in adult learning. It drops to 29% for the unemployed—once again, those people who do not have a job get the least of that kind of adult learning. During the pandemic, that obviously got reinforced. Basically, England saw a very substantial fall in participation of workers in adult learning. Those are really important contextual variables.

It is the post-16 scaled system where many people fall through the cracks and that tends to reinforce initial school differentials. I want to say again, even a university degree in the UK does not provide insurance against poor skills. You have literacy and numeracy skills among British university graduates roughly on par with what we see in Finnish or Japanese high school graduates. There is a very wide spectrum of those kinds of skills. It is really important to look closely at what people know and can do, and maybe pay a little bit less attention the formal degrees that are a lot less telling than you might think.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Lord Baker:** May I make a comment on what he said? I have a note here, Andreas. I study your stuff a lot because it is very good. The OECD identified the UK as one of just six countries spending less per student on vocational education than on academic education. You are nodding. This is not surprising, because in 1945 Germany adopted our system of grammar schools, technical schools and high schools, and they still have it. Austria stops the national curriculum at 14. If I was advising the national curriculum today, I would stop it at 14. That is a much better age to transfer children than 11. I think we are the only country left in the world transferring children at 11. It is only because 11 was once the end of the school education period, until 1914. That is why we are well behind Europe. All that he has said confirms that.

**Chair:** Sorry, I want to bring in Caroline.

**Lord Baker:** I'll shut up!

**Chair:** We have a lot to get through, so we need to be faster with the answers.

Q9 **Caroline Ansell:** In terms of those post-16 choices and that comparative perspective, is part of the challenge that we have quite a complex post-16 landscape and there are many different pathways, routes and choices? There are questions then about the quality of some of those choices. Is that part of the issue? How does our landscape compare with our OECD neighbours?

**Andreas Schleicher:** It is the number of choices but also the navigation through that. The signals that the system provides is very much geared towards, "Whenever you can, go to university or higher education," and the rest of is a more residual approach. The signalling is at least as important as the number of choices. That is not actually unusual. You have quite a lot of flexibility in many OECD countries now.

Q10 **Dr Johnson:** Lord Baker, I wanted to ask you about what you said about the more creative qualifications, in music, art, drama and design technology. Many of those qualifications require quite a lot of time outside the classroom to produce the artwork, or to practise drama and music. I have a 15-year-old daughter who is in the first year of her GCSE courses. One of the things that her school advised her was to limit the number of choices in that sort of category because of the huge workload involved. Do you think there are ways we could teach those subjects differently, such that they did not have a proportionally greater impact on workload than other subjects, to make them more accessible?

**Lord Baker:** I think it is a workload that is rather welcome by teachers who teach drama, dance and music and those sorts of things. We have an extraordinary UTC in Tower Hamlets. UTCs do 14 to 18. I will argue later why 14 is better. It is 60% girls, who come from families where for 40%, English is a second language. About 60% of the girls study health and social care and a very high proportion of those get into universities as a result. The others are doing the creative arts. They link up with the National Theatre and Netflix, and there is an interaction. The National



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Theatre comes and does rehearsals in the UTC in Tower Hamlets. They get to know the actors and producers and how things are staged. I have never had any complaint from any of the teachers about the workload, and I try to encourage them to take them to the theatre in London as well, or to take them to events in London, apart from just going to gigs and that sort of thing.

- Q11 **Dr Johnson:** Sorry, the workload I meant was for the children themselves. If you were a child studying English, maths, two sciences, history, geography or French, perhaps, and other subjects, then the workload involved in drama, design and technology and art is much greater than in any of the other sort of subjects.

**Lord Baker:** Yes, I would agree with you on that. That is why I would limit the national curriculum. From 2003 to 2010, it was not compulsory for schools to have geography, history or a foreign language as a compulsory subject. It worked rather well, actually, and that saw a great increase in the number of creative subjects and also some increase in technical subjects. I do agree with you. The colleges I support have a longer working day already; we work about 35 hours a week and that gets it in. To some extent, the White Paper is right in extending the working day.

The biggest regret I had as Education Secretary was that I was not able to increase the working day by one lesson, and I could not do it because I had changed so much. Another thing I had to do was to settle the teachers' strike and part of the settlement of the teachers' strike is that in their contracts they are limited to the number of hours they can teach a year. If I were to extend it by an extra lesson, I would have to reopen the whole of that negotiation. I just could not do that, having just settled the strike; it would have been awful. However, it is a regret and I am so very glad that the White Paper is going to do it.

I think it has big consequences; teachers will want more for it. They will not take it lying down, I do not think, if they are asked to do extra hours. What I am really saying is that there should be a choice. If you are down to only five basic subjects, you have greater choice in the curriculum to choose other subjects, particularly the creative ones.

The other thing that is totally lacking from the curriculum is inventiveness. It is not in. The other thing that is totally lacking from the curriculum today is anything on climate change and green studies. The only way you can do green studies in Britain is a bit in biology—the carbon cycle—and a bit in geography. The present curriculum does not encourage multidisciplinary study of any sort indeed. You cannot do green without multidisciplinary. You have to deal with climate change, sustainability, net zero, electric this and electric that, new renewables and all the rest of it. For young children today, it is not taught really in any of your local schools, significantly, but the students in your schools, and the age that they are, are more interested in this than in almost any other subject. They go on parades about it. Young people are getting interested in climate change, really in a very significant way.



- Q12 Dr Johnson:** I would disagree that they are not taught about it in local schools. I have received a number of letters from classes full of children in local schools. My own son is currently learning about the effects of deforestation on orangutans and how we look after our world, and my daughter has been learning about the different types of energy and the way we use energy and fossil fuels. I think it is taught in schools in various different lessons, actually.

**Lord Baker:** It does not lead up to a course that has an exam at the end of it, though, I do not think, apart from a little bit of geography.

**Caroline Ansell:** Lord Baker, that sounds like you might support my petition for a GCSE in natural history, which I know is actively being considered, to build on all the very good work that is done in every key stage. It would bring all those strands together.

**Chair:** I am going to bring in Miriam now.

- Q13 Miriam Cates:** I am very interested, Andreas, in what you are saying about the skills, particularly the soft skills of British children compared to European counterparts. You paint a very bleak picture, particularly in terms of the lack of progress between generations that has been seen in other countries but not here. The change to the level 3 qualifications in terms of more work experience—that is the predominant change in T-levels—is positive. However, from what you are saying, it sounds like you think that those core skills, such as being able to use knowledge but also things such as communication, teamwork and those kinds of things, start much, much earlier. What do European schools do that we do not do in terms of teaching those softer skills that employers are looking for?

**Andreas Schleicher:** There are several dimensions. Starting in the early years in school, there is often much greater emphasis on the application and use of knowledge. You have curricula that provide more space for teachers to teach fewer things but at greater depth. It is easy for us to add a lot of things to the curriculum—whether it is climate or inventiveness or creativity—but you can teach creativity as well in mathematics as you can in the arts. The question is whether the curriculum provides that space for teachers. The risk is always to make learning a mile wide and an inch deep—to put a lot of content in a very shallow context for students.

Why do the Japanese do so well on collaborative problem-solving skills? Because a lot of their lessons are designed around student collaboration. Normally we make you learn a lot of stuff, and at the end we give you an exam where you have to demonstrate you're better than your neighbour. That doesn't particularly encourage social skills. Japan is a good example of where they have intentional instructional design to facilitate this.

If you go to the Nordic countries in Europe—Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Estonia—you will have a lot more phenomenon-based learning. They will probably talk about climate change in the maths lesson, the science lesson and the history lesson, and the students learn to think across the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

boundaries of subject disciplines. So I think it's about instructional development.

When it comes to the post-school period, the T-levels are a very promising development. You give more space to work experience; vocational education and training really hinges on that component. The school-based component cannot make up for that. It is really about that kind of genuine work experience.

The question is really how you make the T-levels as attractive as the A-levels, so that they are not just provided, and are not a low-level qualification, but are intellectually as demanding, and are equipped as well—the point was made earlier that, currently, the UK invests less per applied learning student than for students in academic learning. If we switch that around to ensure that these environments really get the best resources and are the most interesting and demanding ones, I think the T-levels could then become a really great success.

**Lord Baker:** Could I just say one thing? I very much agree with what Andreas was saying. How do you get practical education into an ordinary school? It is very difficult to do, quite frankly, because you need workshops. I suspect that, in the secondary schools in your constituencies, you don't see many workshops—you see classrooms.

The university technical colleges, which I have been promoting since 2010—we now have 47 of them—are the most successful schools in the country on avoiding unemployment. Some 55% of our students go to university to do a STEM subject, 25% become apprentices, the rest get local jobs and hardly any join the ranks of the unemployed. The youth unemployment levels in your constituencies are, on average, I suspect, about 10% or 11%. That's the general average for the country—yours might be a bit better or a bit worse. Our level is 3%, and half our colleges send no one into the ranks of the unemployed each year.

We have a curriculum that says that the 14-year-olds have to spend two days a week designing and making things with their hands. They use tools for the first time; they have often never used a hammer or a screwdriver when we take them in. They then get on to working drilling lathes, other lathes and 3D printers. When you go into your local schools ask them how many 3D printers they've got. I think 3D printers are the most important change since the industrial revolution. They are going to revolutionise our societies completely and utterly. Do you know that, in America, they are now building houses with 3D printers? They can build a flat-roofed house with two rooms, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen in 48 hours. They are now going to produce expensive houses built by 3D printers. In most of your schools, you probably do not have 3D printers, because in order to use them—

**Miriam Cates:** Mine all have them.

**Lord Baker:** Oh, well that is excellent. But in order to use them, students have to do CAD/CAM—they have to be able to design a three-dimensional



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

image on a screen in order to copy it. I am very glad to know that you have some; I think we ought to have lots more.

**Chair:** Okay. We have a quick supplementary from Ian.

- Q14 **Ian Mearns:** You have talked about a growth in T-levels, Andreas. Although what they provide is welcome, part of the problem is that we will need a cultural shift among businesses in this country, and for them to provide the work experience for people on T-levels, for us to deliver on that agenda. At the moment, it is not broadly accepted that employers have to engage themselves in training at that stage. It is not so much a problem in the large companies, but it is a significant problem in the small and medium-sized enterprises, which provide so much of our employment base. Could you expand on that?

**Lord Baker:** Yes, indeed.

**Ian Mearns:** Sorry, Lord Baker; I was asking Andreas in the first instance.

**Lord Baker:** I agree with what you are saying. One of the things that Boris has said, which is absolutely right, is that he wants to put industry at the heart of education. That has not happened. It happens in UTCs because in the governing body of a UTC, the majority are local businesses and the local university—not the usual make-up of boards in your constituency.

I have found that it is quite difficult to engage industry to take an interest in education, quite frankly. They do expect the schools and the education system to produce something they want. They are very rarely interested in what is being taught in the schools. We are now supported by 500 companies in the UTC movement, and we have identified companies. We have one person who spends his entire life engaging local companies, because we expect them to decide the curriculum for the school, and then to—

- Q15 **Ian Mearns:** But we are talking about scaling this up, Lord Baker—that is the problem. UTCs have had varying levels of success around the country; some have not done particularly well, while others have thrived. For instance, I represent a constituency in the north-east of England, and—I have used this stat in this Committee on a number of occasions—there are only 1,000 companies in the north-east of England with more than 50 employees. It is about making sure, then, that the SMEs in that employment base become involved in this whole process, otherwise there will not be the capacity in industry, without that cultural shift, to provide the work experience for youngsters who want to do T-levels.

**Lord Baker:** I would agree with everything you have said. On T-levels, we are going to try to make them work with UTCs. We were in the first round of teaching them for a year—we have now been teaching them for 18 months. The thing that we have discovered is that it does not suit children who get 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 in GCSE—they drop out, I am afraid. We will know what the results are at the end of this year, in August.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

I think T-level are, in many ways, a good idea, but can I explain them as I see them? T-levels are very academic—80% academic, 20% practical. That is not enough. You have to have practical at a much higher level in order to do skilled education—that is simply not enough. That is one of the problems they have. One of the things constraining T-levels is that small companies cannot do it; they cannot provide 45 days. Even British Aerospace said to us that they have difficulty doing 45 days. I think that T-levels will have to do much more teaching in workshops—build some workshops in their schools and do more practical work. I think that I—

**Ian Mearns:** I am sorry Lord Baker, but can we get Andreas to respond to the question as well?

**Chair:** Andreas, I am going to get you in, then Tom with a supplementary, and then Apsana.

**Andreas Schleicher:** I think it is clear that the issue of employer engagement is absolutely critical to the success of T-levels. I am not sure that this is so much a matter of a cultural shift on the part of employers as a question about the lack of intermediary institutions. The phenomenon that apprenticeships and support for work-based learning are easy in large companies and difficult in small and medium-sized enterprises is a universal one. It is simply a matter of fact. If you run a very small company, it is very hard to provide high-quality apprenticeships, but that is where I think Government comes in. Rather than substituting employers with second-grade, school-based vocational learning, help them.

In Norway, there is an intermediary institution where small companies can share apprentices, so if you can't hire a full one you can actually work with part of it. For the apprentice it is great because they learn in multiple companies. In the same way, you can provide facilities where small and medium-sized enterprises can pool their training resources. There is a lot that countries can do to facilitate and make it easier for companies to do that, because the economics of vocational education and apprenticeships actually work out really well for employers in the long run. Thirdly, make sure that the training programmes are of sufficient duration. Much of the work-based learning in Britain and even apprenticeships are of a relatively short duration. Then, of course, it is a lot more expensive for employers than a longer apprenticeship, where more value is being created.

I think those things can be figured out. I would be quite confident that your companies and business sector will respond favourably. Again, there is no mismatch on that part. The skills that are available are used quite effectively in Britain. I would rather think about ways to make it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises to do that. Countries that have recently been very successful in introducing that shift—they started out where Britain is today and are now in a different place—are Denmark and Norway. They had that same problem but are now doing quite well in getting those small and medium-sized enterprises actively involved.

**Q16 Tom Hunt:** This is primarily to Lord Baker. You said that you agreed with the Prime Minister that industry should be at the heart of education.

**Lord Baker:** Yes, I do.

- Q17 **Tom Hunt:** But that in practice you find that sometimes industry is not taking the kind of interest you would like. The Government has established local skills improvement plans—

**Lord Baker:** A very good idea.

- Q18 **Tom Hunt:** They are a way of trying to, I guess, lock industry into shaping the curriculum both in FE and HE. My first question was going to be whether you think they are a good idea, but you clearly do think they are a good idea, so that is good to hear.

Turning to my second question, clearly, local universities have a very important role to play when it comes to greater focus on skills and technical education, but to what extent do you think the Government should play a role in encouraging universities to go down this route if they do not want to or are being resistant—

**Lord Baker:** To encourage them to do what, sorry?

**Tom Hunt:** To go down this route of actively engaging constructively with skills improvement plans. To what extent should their *raison d'être* be supporting local employment in the local area, or should it just simply be bums on seats?

**Lord Baker:** Many universities do not have very close contact with the local employers, quite frankly, because they take children from all over the country. When we get a university to sit on our board, they first have to decide the curriculum. You mention the local skills plans that the Government are introducing. That is a good idea. You are going to get them interested. But they are going to change, basically, the teaching patterns of FE colleges. They are not allowed to change schools below 16. In fact, schools below 16 are not expected to receive them at all or have an influence on them. Coming back again, I think you have to start technical education much earlier than we are doing. That is one of the messages that I would like to leave with you very strongly indeed. To pick it all up at 16 is too late.

Engaging industry is difficult. Let me say this at once. BTECs—this is a very controversial subject—lead to many apprenticeships. That is why keeping BTECs running alongside T-levels for as long as possible is very sensible. T-levels will survive in an elite sort of way. To give a comparison, to show the difference between BTECs and T-levels, T-levels are like creating an officer class. They are the sort of Sandhurst approach. I don't object to that; you do need highly skilled people at a high level. But armies are mainly sustained by the next grade down, by the regimental sergeant majors, the sergeant majors, the corporals and the NCOs. And so an army is held together.

Using that comparison with education, the T-levels are going for the 7s, 8s and 9s, but there is a need for qualified technicians, people who get to level 4 and level 5. Level 4 is the higher national certificate and level 5 is



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

the higher national diploma. That is where the skills shortages are on a massive scale.

I live in London and, if you have a plumbing problem, you ring up Pimlico Plumbers who will send you a plumber for £80 an hour. If you have need of them for the day that is £640. Those are people who basically have level 4 and 5. They don't particularly want to go on to level 6 for two years, because they are already earning such a lot of money. Therefore, they are very happy with that.

If you are going to increase vocational training significantly in Britain, you have to expand levels 4 and 5. FE colleges are not all that good at doing that. If you start at an FE college at 16 your chance of getting into level 4 is 6%; only 6% go on to level 4. I hope that the skills plans will improve FE college training. I think they are directed to improve FE college training, and that will be very good if they do.

**Ian Mearns:** I would point out, Lord Baker, that other plumbing companies are available in the Greater London area. Okay?

Q19 **Tom Hunt:** But in essence you support local skills plans

**Lord Baker:** Yes, absolutely.

Q20 **Tom Hunt:** And think they should go further and play a role in shaping the curriculum, pre-16.

**Lord Baker:** Those are very much my feelings.

**Chair:** Apsana, I would like to bring in Andreas a bit more, if I can. I know it is difficult on Zoom.

Q21 **Apsana Begum:** I just have a quick follow-up question, going back to international comparisons, specifically on reading, maths and science. The OECD figures show that the UK scored above the OECD averages in reading, maths and science. But, in comparison with countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore, the UK was lower than the average performance. I would like two things we could learn from countries outside Europe and their education systems.

**Chair:** I'm going to bring in Andreas first, please.

**Lord Baker:** Yes, certainly. Would Andreas like to comment on that?

**Andreas Schleicher:** Those results refer to schooling results. What you can see, particularly in countries in east Asia, is a much higher level of expectations and standards placed on students. They are also much better at matching resources with needs, particularly for the disadvantaged students in those systems that outperform the UK by the largest margin. If you both come from a wealthy background, the performance difference is not that big, but for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, those countries are a lot more successful than this.

They are better at how to match resources with needs there, and capable of providing career incentives for teachers to educate in high-needs



schools. There are many factors related to this. We could go into this for a long time, but it is interesting that many of the factors driving high performance are quite universal. You also find them in other countries that are not in east Asia: high expectations and the capacity to match resources to needs. The curriculum is rich and gets students to use and apply what they know creatively. Teaching being a very attractive career is also part of it. It is not just about making teaching financially attractive but making it intellectually more attractive. I heard mention of workload, but I am not sure that there is much evidence that British teachers have a greater workload than those elsewhere. In fact the student-staff ratio in Britain is quite favourable internationally, but clearly the work of teachers is defined as such that it is not judged to be as attractive as teaching in a country such as Singapore.

**Chair:** May I bring in Anna, please?

- Q22 **Anna Firth:** Following on from the last point, I think there is general agreement that our education system must deliver skills that relate to the jobs and professions that we need to power the country forward, as well as look after the people in it. It seems to me that we have a problem at university level, because a lot of young people that I know have gone to university and read history, English, psychology or other social sciences—and I have absolutely nothing against those brilliant topics—that do not necessarily lead to jobs at the end of it. We have a massive shortage of GPs at the moment, but to get into medical school is a job in itself; it is not just about getting the grades, but running an absolute campaign to get in. Something is going wrong there.

I wonder whether we need to look far more broadly at the issue of degree apprenticeships. That is a well-established path. What would you both say to that being expanded to, for example, the medical profession? Could we not have medical apprenticeships, so that we can encourage nurses or physiotherapists?

**Chair:** We have nursing degree apprenticeships, but not—

**Anna Firth:** Exactly. But we should go further with that programme, so that we can get rid of the bottleneck with respect to doctors, and coding. We are going to need coders in their thousands but you do not get to be a coder reading history, psychology or English at university.

**Lord Baker:** I agree with virtually everything you said. We do a lot of degree apprenticeships in UTCs, and some of the universities are very good at it, for example, Sheffield Hallam, and London South Bank University is well worth visiting as it does a lot of them. I strongly support degree apprenticeships because that involves earning, getting wages, while you are doing it. I accept that, and I would like to see much more of it. As I said, we do a lot of it. We also do a lot of hired apprentices.

Coming on to universities, as your point is absolutely right, I think having a target of 50% participation was completely wrong. When I was Education Secretary, one of my final speeches in 1989 or so was to say that by the turn of the century I thought that we would have about 30%



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

going to universities, and I thought that somewhere between 30% and 40% was probably right for universities. I never set targets—I thought it would occur by natural circumstances. And then the desire was that everybody should go to university. We send 55% of our students to university, but 75% of them do STEM subjects, because they have been studying them since the age of 14 in our colleges. You have to therefore start much earlier, and actually start in the primary schools. Those schools are now doing coding, but when a child leaves a primary school at 11 and goes to a secondary school that is not really teaching computing, they have lost four years, quite frankly. You have to impregnate skills at a much earlier stage, right through.

You have now got a considerable level of graduate unemployment and under-employment. I don't think the politicians have twigged what that means in a very big way. By the way, you also have the highest rates of drop-outs after years one and two—the figures have just come out from the Education Media Centre. That has huge social consequences, because if universities are seen to be the way for social mobility, that is marvellous, because you get a good job, you climb up, you get a better house, a nice car, better mortgage and all the rest of it. If that is denied to you, you have social decline. You do not have social mobility going up; you have social decline. I don't think that politicians realise how resentful that group of people are going to be. They will feel immensely let down.

I actually approve of the fact that the student loan has now become a student tax. I introduced the student loans, and I tried to persuade the then Chancellor of the day, Nigel Lawson, to accept it as a tax; he wouldn't do it. It is a tax. But that does mean that the actual debt of a student is going to go up from about £40,000 or £50,000 over a lifetime to nearly £100,000, and they have to pay interest on it. It is not a loan at all; it is a tax.

I will tell you why it is not a loan. If you are a student who dies not having paid off your loan, it is cancelled; normally, when someone dies a loan is not cancelled, but charged against the residuary estate. It is not a loan in any meaningful sense anymore; it is a student tax. Students have to pay very much more for it. It is a sort of stealth tax really.

**Chair:** Andreas, do you want to comment on that at all?

**Andreas Schleicher:** I agree with the premise of the question. If you go to the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, a lot of the skills that I developed in the former training institutions in the UK, the universities, are actually provided through the apprenticeship group. That was my earlier point. I don't think it is helpful to raise the aspiration of T-levels and apprenticeships if they are reduced to being just in a low-level applied job. In many high-skill jobs, whether in banking, technology or the medical sector, apprenticeship is a powerful route to equip individuals with the right skills.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Lord Baker:** Yes. Germany has a very good apprenticeship system, doesn't it, Andreas? Industry really runs the apprenticeship system in Germany, doesn't it?

**Andreas Schleicher:** Yes, that is true in a number of countries. Switzerland, Germany and Austria have a similar system, and the Netherlands and Denmark fall into that category now as well. Apprenticeship is run in co-operation between Government and the industry, through councils that design the curriculum and agree on the mix of work and school-based components. About 20% of that system is paid for by industry, based on the benefits that it will derive directly from this; the rest is organised as part of the school-based environment.

Q23 **Anna Firth:** I would like to ask a totally different question, as I highlighted at the beginning, Andreas. As we have the benefit of your experience across Europe, I would like to ask you a question about covid response and recovery. As you know, in the UK during the first lockdown, we had a terrible situation in which schools closed—20% of students were doing four to five hours of online tuition, and another 20% of students were doing one hour or less—and that gave rise to all primary and secondary school students being behind to a greater or lesser extent. Sorry, that 20% are the ones who are behind, and we are now working to catch them up. I am interested to know what the covid response across Europe was. What can we learn from the way in which other countries dealt with the pandemic and the problem with education? What is the recovery programme across Europe? Are there other countries that we can look at and learn from?

**Andreas Schleicher:** That is a complex question. You find a lot of variability. First, you have got a good number of countries that were a bit more successful than Britain in reducing school closures, the length of school closures. Britain is not one of the worst ones, but clearly school closures have been quite extensive. There are other countries that were not prepared for alternatives, particularly digital alternatives. If you go to Estonia, within days, they were ready to learn online, because that is what they had used before. So, digital preparedness comes into this, and then frontline capacity.

In the immediate aftermath, many countries went to provide additional support. One thing is clear: students were affected differentially by this. Basically, if you come from a home background that was very supportive or if you could learn on your own, you were less affected than students who were left to their own devices. What we have seen in the aftermath of the crisis is a lot of additional learning opportunities and tutoring, and sometimes former teachers were brought back into the system to provide additional responses. We cannot evaluate yet the effects of those compensatory mechanisms. I think the next year will show that in the outcome results. It is highly varied across countries.

In the country where I live, schools were closed just for a few weeks. The country kept schools as a priority, even when the pandemic was really tough. The shopping centres were closed, but not the schools. I think that



is also a factor. The OECD finds no relationship between infection rates and school closures across Europe. You basically have countries that were very badly affected by the pandemic, but they were still able to manage their schooling system, and others that were not as badly affected, which had quite dramatic school closures.

Q24 **Chair:** Was it wrong to shut schools for most pupils?

**Andreas Schleicher:** Personally, I would say yes. In hindsight, at least, we know that it would have been possible to keep schools operating. We probably overestimated the health risks from schools and underestimated the possibilities to reconfigure space, time and technology in schools to create safe spaces for students. This was the first experience, but you can see that in the second wave. In the second and third waves of covid, countries were doing much better than in the first wave.

Q25 **Dr Johnson:** My question relates to a previous point you made, Andreas, on the matching of resources for disadvantaged students. By “disadvantaged”, did you mean students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or where there had not been high educational attainment by parents in the household? Or did you mean SEND pupils—those with special educational needs? To Lord Baker’s point and the concern around that lowest quartile and the access to post-16 education, I am keen to understand your point. In terms of the matching of resources, was that a pre-16 school setting or were you talking about post-16?

**Andreas Schleicher:** Yes, I was talking just about socioeconomic factors, such as parental income and education. We do not have comparative data on special educational needs.

Q26 **Dr Johnson:** That is really interesting. Do you think there is an imperative to look at that information across the OECD about how students with SEND perform differently in terms of that curriculum experience and their access to qualifications?

**Andreas Schleicher:** Absolutely, I agree. It is just difficult to do it internationally. The concept of special educational needs varies hugely. In the UK, it is a few percentage points. Those are particularly identified. If you go to a Finnish school and ask, “How many students with special educational needs do you have?”, they would tell you 100%. They would basically say, “Every student needs a tailored learning environment” and they are actually doing that. They are very good at matching resources to the individual needs of students. The talented students get additional support, as do students with special needs. This concept of special needs is interpreted so differently across countries. That is why comparisons for that are difficult, and we have not done that.

Q27 **Dr Johnson:** Understood. Although you have only increased my desire to see some of that work, because one of our major challenges is helping our students to move from level 2 to 3 or level 3 to 4. There is significant work to do there.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Lord Baker:** Andreas, I am told that Holland has a very good system of vocational education. I know less about it than others. Could you tell us your views on that?

**Andreas Schleicher:** It is quite typical. What the Netherlands stand out with is their high level of mobility. It is very easy for people to navigate between the apprenticeship route and higher education. If you become a car mechanic and you want to become an engineer later on, the system is very good at allowing you to move between them. The apprenticeship system and employer engagement would not be very different from what you see in Germany, Denmark or Austria, but the way the system facilitates horizontal mobility is very good. I think that is an important point.

Apprenticeships should never be a one-way road, particularly in today's world. It is very important that continued education and training in the apprenticeship sector is facilitated. It is even more important there than in the academic sector. Workplace changes are dramatic. Even though an apprenticeship is a great route into employment early on in your life, there is a significant long-term risk if you do not upgrade your skills, and that is where I think the Netherlands is a very good example.

Q28 **Miriam Cates:** My question has already been answered, really, but I will rephrase it. Lord Baker, you touched on it briefly about how the transition at 16 might be a better transition, or a choice, at 14. I instinctively agree with you. Having been a secondary school teacher myself, I know that by age 14 most children know what kind of route they are suited to, or what they are not suited to. Can you expand a bit more on how we would move to a system of choice at 14?

**Lord Baker:** I am glad to have found a fan of transfer at 14, because this is what the private sector does, and they have got it right. I think the real transfers should be at nine and 14. There is a difference at nine. In most primary schools up to eight or nine it is single-teacher teaching in a class and then it gets more specialised. I think it should change. What we have found in UTCs is that it is quite difficult to recruit at 14 because the whole system is against us, and schools don't like us. They hate us and say that if you go to a UTC it is like going to a PRU and all the rest of it. What we have found is that at 14 youngsters have a very clear idea, most of them, of what they want to do. They are more mature than my generation was at 14. When I was 14 in the late 1940s, we were different.

**Miriam Cates:** Plenty of 14-year-olds went to work—

**Lord Baker:** They are much more developed today. There is no question about it.

We are now going through a big recruitment phase. We are getting very big recruitment now. We are overstaffed and will have to turn away hundreds of students this year at 14, I am afraid—hundreds. We can't expand. They learn by word of mouth. When I go and see them in their first year, I always ask them, "How did you hear of us?" One of the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

interesting answers is, "My mum told me about it." Mums seems to be much more into it than dads, but that is a minor consideration. They say, "We heard about it; we heard a rumour about it; we searched for you on the net and we rather liked what we saw." These are 13 and 14-year-olds wanting something different.

If you look at our education system, you have a lot of disenchanted and disgruntled 13 and 14-year-olds who feel that they are not learning anything that will help them get a job, whereas we know from day one when they join us in a UTC that they are thinking of a job. In the first week they are working in a workshop for the first time with their hands, and we treat them as adults. Therefore, we don't get disruption in our UTCs. We don't get the trouble that many of your schools have in your constituencies of unruly students. They barely exist. We very rarely expel a student, because they have a purpose. So I am very, very keen on this.

There was a report by Michael Tomlinson, the ex-chief inspector, on the 14 to 19 phase in education. Blunkett liked it, Adonis liked it, but Blair said, "No, it will weaken A-levels if we do it", so they did not accept it. That was a huge lost opportunity. I would like to see a 14 to 18 element introduced into our schools. That is what is happening in Austria. Austria stops the national curriculum at 14 and has specialist colleges, and they have the lowest rate of NEETs in Europe.

**Q29 Ian Mearns:** Lord Baker, would the 2004 Tomlinson review be a good place to reopen this debate and move it forward?

**Lord Baker:** I would like to go back to that, but it is a big change, so we have developed not only stand-alone UTCs of 600 or 700 students, but we are now developing a system of getting a sleeve into one of your secondary schools—a UTC sleeve that sits alongside Progress 8 and Progress 5. We have got two schools in the country that want to do this, and I am trying to persuade the Secretary of State to let us go ahead and do it. We would have one stream there under a different head. There would be a head doing UTCs, and they would have workshops as well as classrooms. They would have local employers coming in and helping. They will still be doing the Progress 8 and EBacc if that is what they want.

**Q30 Angela Richardson:** Lord Baker, I want to touch on disadvantage with my question. You have said a couple of really striking things today. You talked about T-levels being much more suited to those who achieve 7, 8 and 9. You also talked about there being no improvement in the bottom 30% for 10 years—I think that is very striking. I am interested in your views on the impact of these reforms on our most disadvantaged young people, if most applied general qualifications are removed. Those are young people with special educational needs, those in ethnic minority groups and those who may be disadvantaged due to their geographical location. Could you speak to disadvantage?

**Lord Baker:** Certainly. The Government have correctly identified 51 areas in the country that are disadvantaged. They happen to be the same 51 areas that were disadvantaged in 2002. There has not been a real levelling



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

up or improvement in those areas of any significance under either Government. There has not been progress of any significance for the disadvantaged since 2010 when the Conservatives took control of education policy, I'm afraid. These are the people who need most help, quite frankly, and these are the people who have suffered from reducing all the other subjects in the curriculum in your schools. In 1945 we had 300 technical schools. All sorts of people went to them; Betty Boothroyd went to one and I know one chief inspector who went to one. They were wonderful, but they were closed by snobbery. Everybody wanted the school on the hill, not the one down in the shabby premises in the town—dirty jobs, greasy rags. We had abandoned them by 1960; the comprehensive movement closed them up. I think you have got to reinvent them; you have got to recreate the circumstances where the disadvantaged can study those subjects.

There was a phrase that I used a lot when I was Education Secretary; it is a quotation from one of Shakespeare's lesser known plays, "Timon of Athens". "The fire i'th' flint, Shows not till it be struck". Every child has a bit of flint in them somewhere; you have to find that bit of flint and strike it. That is what education is all about. The flints are very different. When the new permanent secretary appeared before your Committee, she said one remarkable thing. She said that the middle classes like Progress 8. She was right; I think that those in the leafy suburbs do like Progress 8 and EBacc. However, lower middle-class parents and working-class parents do not like that at all, quite frankly. Those are the people who, incidentally, Margaret Thatcher managed to contact and have a relationship with. Therefore, I think you have to concentrate a lot upon those disadvantaged areas. The Government are doing that; they have identified 51 areas and made more money available.

We found a snag in that, by the way. We want to expand UTC Plymouth, which is heavily oversubscribed and is going to have to turn away 150 children in September. The other school that wants to expand in Plymouth is the grammar school. Both have been told that they cannot expand because they have got surplus places. That is not levelling up; that is levelling down. More pressure must be placed into closed schools that have got surplus places—I have no question about that at all. Quite a few of them are religious schools, and that is a tricky thing to do; closing schools is a very tricky thing. However, you have to do something to allow the good schools to expand.

When I became Education Secretary, one of the biggest changes I made was when I found that every school had a certain number of pupils ascribed to it—maybe 750 or 1,000—and it was not allowed to exceed that by one. That meant that a good school could never expand. That is not levelling up; that is levelling down. Now, that has gone, and you have got to find another way. Dealing with disadvantaged children is the main thing, and I think the Government are trying to do this in various ways, but I do not think they are addressing the curriculum enough in order to achieve it.

Q31 **Angela Richardson:** So it is right that the Government have the drive to make these T-levels a higher-quality level of education.

**Lord Baker:** Yes.

Q32 **Angela Richardson:** But for children who fail their GCSE maths and English time and time again, just being able to access it is an issue in and of itself.

**Lord Baker:** About 200,000 BTECs are taken each year, and they are mainly among disadvantaged children of one sort or another, quite frankly. They are taught in FE colleges, they are taught in schools—I am sure some of the schools in your constituency teach BTECs. They are now under threat in a very big way. I hope your Committee will look into that quite seriously, because BTECs should run alongside T-levels, and T-levels have been established.

T-levels will only succeed if students want to take them. If they think it is going to get them into university, they will try to take them; if they find it is not going to and there is no way forward, they will not take them. Similarly, you have big companies now—Rolls-Royce, Bamford and Toyota—that have all made representations to the Secretary of State to say, “BTECs must run alongside T-levels. Don’t abolish BTECs.” It is an absolute way forward for disadvantaged children—it really is.

Q33 **Chair:** In terms of the post-16 curriculum, 150 other countries do an International Baccalaureate. Rather than people narrowing at the age of 16—as we do in this country, with people doing A-levels—they do an International Baccalaureate, which includes vocational and technical as well as academic education and embeds careers. Should we be looking at that here? Would that be a good way forward post-16? I will start with you, Andreas, and then Lord Baker.

**Lord Baker:** Well, he knows about it very well.

**Chair:** Andreas.

**Andreas Schleicher:** It is a difficult judgment call. It is very hard to link that to evidence on transitions, but I would certainly argue that, in the world in which we live, broadening the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values is important. I believe that the International Baccalaureate is a good example of what a qualifications framework that equips people with the flexibility to move can look like.

In our lives, we will have to continue to learn. We used to learn to do the work; now learning is the work, and how we facilitate this depends very much on the breadth of those kinds of qualifications. In the United States, people would even add liberal arts studies as an additional component to this, but I do believe that the baccalaureate is probably also the direction in which the world is moving.

**Lord Baker:** Is the International Baccalaureate expanding in Europe? Are more people doing it?



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Andreas Schleicher:** Yes, and not just in Europe. You can see this as a global trend, and even where countries continue to use their national exams, they are broadening as well. I think young people now have access to a broader range of content in the exams.

**Lord Baker:** Interesting. The only experience I have is that one of our UTCs has done the International Baccalaureate, and they love it. We deal with some quite disadvantaged children in UTCs; we get a lot of black and ethnic minority students in UTCs, and they all love it. They like the breadth of it, they are very committed to it, and one or two other UTCs want to do it now. We are learning, but they do like that approach. It is not as exam-dominated as our system is.

Q34 **Chair:** Should we get rid of A-levels, or should we offer it as an option—either A-levels or an International Baccalaureate?

**Lord Baker:** I am in favour of a TechBacc at 18—a combination.

Q35 **Chair:** Andreas, should we get rid of A-levels and have an International Baccalaureate, or offer both options to students as a sort of evolutionary approach?

**Lord Baker:** I think that if students want to take a specific A-level, like foreign languages, they will certainly want an A-level. Or history—I was history, right. If they want to do that, then, yes, but I think—

**Chair:** I will bring in Andreas.

**Andreas Schleicher:** My sense is that getting rid of something is always hard. Just opening up additional possibilities is the better way. I think the T-levels are already broadening the avenues, but I would avoid associating them with special needs, disadvantage or anything. I really think that would very quickly become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The goal should really be to broaden the kind of perspectives that young people have, and also to make sure that there are multiple ways towards universities and higher education.

Q36 **Chair:** What about allowing people to do T-levels and maybe an A-level as well, rather than just either T-levels or A-levels?

**Andreas Schleicher:** Absolutely. I think the more you can tailor the qualifications framework to the individual interests and needs of individuals, the better they will be equipped—absolutely.

**Chair:** Thank you. Anna has a quick question, and then I will bring in Ian. Then we are going to wrap up.

Q37 **Anna Firth:** How can we promote the International Baccalaureate, though, when it is not as well understood as A-levels by either parents or universities? It is definitely a broader post-16 education. I have had two who have done the International Baccalaureate, and one who has done A-levels, and I have been a governor of a school that does the International Baccalaureate—in fact, the school that gave evidence to this Committee. Studying five subjects instead of three, and the community



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

engagement piece that goes with it, definitely leads to a broader, more holistic education, more critical thinking and more independent thinking—the things that Lord Baker talked about at the beginning.

But there are two problems. First, there is equivalence. It is not fully understood at university what the score of an International Baccalaureate means in relation to A-levels, and students have to get a much higher score with the IB to get into some courses. Secondly, there is the expense, because it requires more teachers to deliver the International Baccalaureate. A number of schools try it, then have to give it up because they cannot recruit enough teachers. If we think this is a good model, how can we promote it?

**Chair:** Andreas?

**Lord Baker:** For me, it goes by word of mouth more than anything else. We have one doing it, and others now want to do it. It is expensive; you have to pay a bit more for it, and it does require more teachers, but we can just about squeeze. I think the 16 to 19-year-old phase in schools is quite well funded for teaching, particularly for disadvantaged children, and we benefit from that, but that does not happen below 16. It means you have to start fairly young; all of this comes down to starting much younger.

**Chair:** Okay. Andreas, can you come in on that?

**Andreas Schleicher:** On the promotion of it, I believe that if universities understand the International Baccalaureate, parents will. I really think that is the starting point. If you can make sure that the users of the baccalaureate are well established, I would not worry about the parents.

I am not so sure about the question of resources. Once again, I think the UK is quite favourably positioned when it comes to both financial resources and teaching resources and numbers. Many other countries deliver those IB programmes with a lot less resource. It is really, I think, more a question of effectiveness of resource utilisation, so I do not see that that should be the barrier. That the IB is inherently more expensive than the A-levels, I find hard to understand.

Q38 **Ian Mearns:** On that, Andreas, you referred earlier to the Finnish model. In a different iteration of this Committee, we visited Finland as we followed Michael Gove on evidence-based policy a number of years ago. Of course, the Finnish model is hugely differentially resourced compared with the English model. The schools that we visited had their own educational psychologists on site. They had their own educational social workers on site. They had attendance officers on site. From the perspective of having professionals other than teachers, they were very well resourced by comparison with most English schools, so it is difficult to make comparisons when you are talking about educating the whole child, as it were.

**Andreas Schleicher:** I think that is true, but Finland puts more of its resources at the frontline of the education system. If you look at the total



amount of money that the Government spends on education, they are not very different from you. In fact, when you look at this in relation to GDP, you spend more than Finland on education. That is my point: it is more a question of resource utilisation than overall spending levels.

**Q39 Ian Mearns:** That is very interesting. It is about priorities, how we spend that money and how it impacts on the individual child.

Lord Baker, one of the conundrums that we have had—we have had a discussion about this in the past—is how we encourage young people to move towards apprenticeships. Of course, one of the problems that we all know exists in schools is that there are perverse incentives within our system to retain as many pupils as possible at particular schools because of bums-on-seats funding regimes—I cannot remember how they came about, but we will not go into that at the moment. How are we going to get round that conundrum of perverse funding incentives and also make sure that each individual youngster has access to impartial and independent careers information, advice and guidance, which might, if it is right for them, lead them towards choosing the apprenticeship model?

**Lord Baker:** Two answers. First, on information to schools, I did introduce a clause called the Baker clause three years ago.

**Ian Mearns:** You also introduced the 1988 Act, which brought about bums-on-seats funding regimes, but we will not go into that.

**Chair:** I should declare that as a former skills Minister, I passed the legislation in the Commons to implement the Baker clause.

**Lord Baker:** Thank you very much. That is now going to happen, because schools do not like those meetings. When anybody comes into a school—you are quite right—it is about bums on seats. Money goes, and they lose £5,000 or £6,000 a year. They do not want to advertise any other alternative to what they are doing, and they are keeping children who would be much better off at other schools. There is no question about that.

The Select Committee on Youth Unemployment had seven recommendations on apprenticeships, focusing everything on 16 to 24-year-olds and not on making people of 40, 50 and 60 apprentices—that is a misuse of the word, frankly, because it is adult education. All our recommendations from the Select Committee have been turned down by the Government, including curriculum reform and assessment reform, so I am afraid we are not going to get any change before the next election, as far as I can see.

But apprentices are really very important. You have to give more support to the smallest companies with their wages. For a company employing only 10 people, employing an apprentice costs £10,000 or £12,000 a year—certainly the living wage—so the smaller companies should get support for that from the Government. Maybe companies employing less than 50 or something should get their apprentices' salaries paid by the Government. These are recommendations we made, and I suppose you



will be making recommendations. The apprenticeship levy is a real mess at the moment—a total and complete mess.

- Q40 **Ian Mearns:** I could not agree more. Andreas, from your perspective—looking at us, as opposed to our international competitors and comparators—what alternative models for post-16 education in England would make a real difference for us at the moment?

**Andreas Schleicher:** First of all, you could broaden the examination system to give a broader foundation for young adults as they move into the labour market and further education. It would be good to avoid the dichotomy that you currently have between university and something else, and to make this a question of horizontal, rather than vertical, choices. That is about making alternatives more attractive. I would argue that, in the long run, the distinction between universities and other pathways will become more blurred. Universities will have to think much more about how they develop applied skills.

Again, the apprenticeship route should get more into developing high-level skills. Some of the ones that were mentioned here are clearly relevant—the medical sector and the technology sector. You rarely see employers preferring people through those routes. Again, giving people greater ownership over what they learn, how they learn, when they learn and where they learn is key. As a Government, you can support individuals to navigate those choices—that is very important.

Providing adequate guidance is another critical dimension, making sure that people understand the choices and their consequences, and do not rely on the providers to sell them things. There should be a good system that does not lead to social stratification. That is worst outcome because the dependence of qualifications on social backgrounds means you are under-utilising your talent. The more you can open that up, the more successful you will be in the long run.

Think about this as a lifelong, life-wide trajectory. It is not about getting a specific kind of qualification at the end of secondary education. It is about enabling people to continue on their pathways for a long time. That is where I have the greatest worry—I quoted adult learning in the UK and the fact that those who need that learning most participate the least. That is the part that needs to be addressed.

**Lord Baker:** That is very good advice. Andreas, would you let me know when you are next likely to visit Britain?

**Andreas Schleicher:** With pleasure.

**Lord Baker:** Perhaps you will be free for lunch. I would like to show you a university technical college, as they are very successful.

**Anna Firth:** Can I ask that the lunch be extended to the whole Committee?

**Chair:** We are reaching the close of these proceedings. Perhaps I can start



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

with you, Andreas—and I mean Andreas, not Lord Baker. It is such a pleasure to have you at the Committee. I have your book, which you kindly signed when we last met. To me, it is a bible of how to build a proper skills-based education system. It is a genuine honour to have you with us. Thank you for being one of the opening witnesses of our inquiry. If you come to London and you meet Lord Baker, I hope we can all have lunch as a Committee—perhaps with the Baker Dearing trust.

I thank you, Lord Baker. I often describe myself as a Bakerite on education policy. It has been invaluable. I think this is the first time since becoming Chair in 2017 that I was not able to control the witness. Nevertheless, you said some incredibly important things that will be a big part of our inquiry. I wish you both well.