

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [The future of post-16 qualifications](#),
HC 55

Tuesday 17 May 2022

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

Questions 78-122

Witnesses

I: Peter Cadwallader, Owner, The Port Hotel, Jane Gratton, Head of People Policy, British Chambers of Commerce, Steven Kearney, Director, SKARCHITECTS, Matthew McCarrick, Director, McCarrick Construction Ltd, Chris Pont, Founder and Chair, IJYI Ltd, Lisa Silcock, Interim Group HR Manager, Naylor Industries PLC, and Andy Webb, Managing Director, Skysmart.

Written evidence from witnesses:



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Peter Cadwallader, Jane Gratton, Steven Kearney, Matthew McCarrick, Chris Pont, Lisa Silcock and Andy Webb.

Chair: Welcome, everyone. Thank you very much for coming today. It is a very important inquiry on skills and post-16 qualifications that we are doing. We are going to go briefly around the table for all of us to introduce ourselves. Could we do that as quickly as possible, because we want to get on to the questioning? I am Robert Halfon, Chair of the Committee and MP for Harlow. I am very glad that Skysmart has come today; that is a company in my constituency of Harlow.

Rebecca Owen-Evans: I am Becky Owen-Evans, the Committee specialist.

Mariam Keating: I am Maz, one of the Clerks for the Committee.

Angela Richardson: I am Angela Richardson, Member of Parliament for Guildford.

Miriam Cates: I am Miriam Cates, Member of Parliament for Penistone and Stocksbridge.

Tom Hunt: I am Tom Hunt, Member of Parliament for Ipswich.

Lisa Silcock: I am Lisa Silcock, HR manager for Naylor Industries.

Chris Pont: I am Chris Pont, founder and chair of a company called IJYI.

Andy Webb: I am Andy Webb, managing director of Skysmart MRO Ltd.

Chair: Before I go to you, Caroline, I just want to go to the Zoom people—sorry, Caroline. Can I have Peter, please?

Peter Cadwallader: My name is Peter Cadwallader, and I am the founder and owner of Port Hotel in Eastbourne.

Chair: That's why I wanted to go to him first.

Caroline Ansell: In Eastbourne? I am Caroline Ansell, Member of Parliament for Eastbourne.

Steven Kearney: I am Steven Kearney, director of SKARCHITECTS.

Anna Firth: I am Anna Firth, Member of Parliament for Southend West. I am delighted to have Steven Kearney here from Southend as well.

Apsana Begum: I am Apsana Begum, Member of Parliament for Poplar and Limehouse in east London.

Jane Gratton: Good morning, everyone. I am Jane Gratton, head of people policy at the British Chambers of Commerce.



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Matthew McCarrick: Hello, I am Matthew McCarrick. I am here representing CAN, Construction Alliance Northeast, and I am managing director of McCarrick Construction, a construction company in Durham.

Q78 **Chair:** That's great; thank you. Just before I hand over to my colleague Anna Firth to chair the first 20 minutes or so of this session, could I ask you all this? Do you think that the curriculum prepares pupils for the world of work? We know that the 2019 employer skills survey suggested that there were more vacancies proving hard to fill because of lack of qualifications or relevant skills and experience than at any point since 2011. And there are many other statistics about how there is a mismatch between what you want as businesses and what the education system is providing. We will not be able to go to everyone to answer every question, but who would like to start off with that?

Chris Pont: My industry is software delivery—really, data and business intelligence services. I think the curriculum prepares candidates for the technical understanding, the high-level concepts, but a lot of what's involved in my industry is very experience based. It's very much about seeing problems as they occur and understanding how to solve those problems. So while the curriculum can prepare students and give them that background and baseline, I think that until they actually get into the world of work, it's very difficult to gather that experience.

Chair: Anyone else?

Steven Kearney: I guess there is a very different view in the profession of architecture about whether students are ready for the world of practice. My own view is that the five years that you do of formal education gives you all the grounding, the resilience and the ability to understand the process of developing architecture, and then it's up to us as practitioners to carry that on through tutelage over the two to five to 10 years. I think that actually students come out very robust and very able to deal with the challenges of designing buildings, working in the planning process and dealing with construction. The thing that they don't readily come out with is the construction technology ability and probably the understanding of the planning system, but that's what we're about.

Chair: Would anyone else like to comment?

Lisa Silcock: On the back of what everyone else has said, I think the curriculum is very academic based and sets pupils, or young people, up to go to university. I think we should be focusing more on the practical side of things. When young people come out of university, they are still missing that experience.

Q79 **Chair:** What would you do to change the curriculum?

Lisa Silcock: I think there needs to be work experience within the curriculum as well, so that young people have those practical skills. In the past, I have had young people working for me; some of them have gone through an academic-based curriculum, coming out of university at 22 years old, while other young employees I have had have worked and then,



part time as an apprentice, gone through the system to degree level. They are more rounded than those who have gone down the academic route. When young people come out of university, they have the theory, but they have not got the practical skills to go with it.

Jane Gratton: We have a network of 53 accredited chambers, representing over 70,000 businesses. When we recently polled them, 30% said that young people were not ready for the work when they left school. When we talk to businesses, they say that what is missing is the applied and contextualised learning; skills such as the ability to problem-solve, the ability to work in a team and, in many respects, personal resilience. While the academic route is fine, it is the more rounded skills, and the personal abilities that allow people to adapt to a changing workplace, that businesses really value.

Q80 **Chair:** I am going to pass over to Anna, but before I do that, I am going to bring in both Peter and Matthew.

Matthew McCarrick: I fully agree that work experience is key. I would go as far as to say that work experience should be compulsory for potentially two to four weeks for school leavers. Work experience could stop someone heading down the route of a degree or further education in something that they have no interest in at all. We take on a lot of people for work experience; some of them, fortunately, are then keen to come into construction and head down an apprentice route, and some of them are not. It is as valuable to the employer and the potential employee to have had that work experience, whether the employee then wants to enrol or not.

Peter Cadwallader: My view is that we have a bit of a one-size-fits-all education system. I agree with what one of the other people said about the curriculum being set up for people to go on to further education—that is not appropriate for many people. My view is that everyone is good at something, and we need to identify at a younger age whether someone is academic or whether they show more practical skills, and then we should encourage them down that route earlier. I think there is a lack of practical skills, particularly communication skills—verbal and written. The people who I employ cannot draft emails and are scared to answer the phone; there is some really basic stuff that I would expect them to have more confidence with if they had a bit more support earlier on.

Chair: I am going to bring Anna in, but we will not be able to get everyone to answer every question, so I ask Anna to point out people who want to answer.

Q81 **Anna Firth:** The theme for the next 20 minutes is knowledge, skills and employability. We have already covered some of that, but it does not matter if we repeat questions or if people repeat points, because we want the fullest exploration possible. The first question is: how can we better ensure that young people leaving education are ready for work now, but also, how can we better help them to adapt to future skills needs? You have already raised the issue of work experience, which is highly relevant



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to this question. If we consider that and consider the barriers to your company taking on pupils for work experience, I think that would be a fruitful line of inquiry. Could people put their hands up to indicate they would like to speak? Otherwise, I will go around in a clockwise fashion, starting with Lisa. If anyone has a burning desire to jump in, feel free.

Lisa Silcock: One of the barriers at schools, as I mentioned previously—though I am not saying all schools—is that the natural, traditional academic route for young adults tends to be A-levels and then going on to university. Some degrees have a much wider focus and are not always the most applicable for employability down the line. On the barriers from industry, I see the benefits of taking on young adults for experience, but there must be time spent with that young adult developing them. You have got to plan and prepare and have a development plan for them. When young adults leave school, they are raw material, and you have to spend time to develop them.

Q82 **Anna Firth:** That is very helpful. Chris?

Chris Pont: In terms of work experience and barriers to entry, we actually haven't found it too bad. We understand that there are going to be certain things we have to do—there will be safeguarding issues and responsibilities and so on. It has been relatively easy working with some of the local schools on those. I guess from our perspective it is a case of time. We have skilled staff working on client projects. They are making sure there are people who can actually sit and teach students and give them an understanding of what we are about and what we do.

On the point about further learning and making sure that students are in a good position to start work, technology in particular is an incredibly fast-moving industry. Things are changing very quickly. We can never teach all of it, even if we wanted to. It is a very difficult subject to teach and make sure is kept current. It is about instilling curiosity and making sure that the student has the curiosity to learn more about that given subject. It is about making sure they can do things in their spare time, such as take on hobby projects and develop their own tools and software in their spare time. That will help them to further develop their skills and keep current with what is available on the marketplace.

Andy Webb: I think it is about growing young people's interests and turning them into a passion. I truly believe that this should come in the pre-16 rather than post-16 stage of schooling—so key stages 1 to 4, really. If key stages 1 to 4 can grow the passion that the young people have, then they will find themselves a career path. Through that career path, they will define a route through education as well.

What we see as a business is that people bounce around different post-16 courses and have lost their way a bit when it comes to GCSEs. They do not have a firm direction with their life sometimes. It is about capturing a direction for them at a younger age—working out where their passions lie, what is going to inspire them, and where they are going to put their biggest effort. As a result, they will achieve the best results and become



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the most employable person they can after successfully completing a post-16 course, whether it be an apprenticeship or A-level or whichever direction they take.

Our industry in particular—aviation—almost relies on passion. It relies on people who have a deep passion and a real bug for aviation. For us as an employer, we see growth and results among high-performing staff who have that passion. That has to start at a young age so that individuals have direction in their life. It might not be aviation; it could be any industry, any sector. Maybe schools need to work closer with industry to enable young people to see what the broad spectrum is out there, and maybe offer experience days.

Recently we have worked with Youth Education Support Services—YESS—which organises aviation days at airfields for schools and other groups such as scouts, cubs and beavers. It is a day to inspire the children and for them to find out what it is like to run an airfield, have a career in aviation or fly an aeroplane. That seed that starts at a young age develops, grows and forms a clear pathway for their future. Obviously, aviation is a very easy one to lay out on the table because it is an exciting industry, but there are a lot of other industries as well that are exciting to different people. Everyone has a broad section of what they enjoy and where their interests lie.

Steven Kearney: That introduction to the subject at an early age is interesting. I guess one thing that schools do not do particularly well is provide robust and clear information on careers advice. Bringing practitioners or particular interest groups into schools for particular events would hugely benefit the teaching process. It would focus the minds of the people who are interested in those subjects on whether there is really an interest, or whether it is just the outside appearance of what those vocations and opportunities might be like.

In relation to work experience, we take on average two to three 15 to 16-year-olds every year. It is a time-consuming and costly process to have young people in the office for what was once three weeks. It used to be two weeks and has now come down to one week, which does not give you enough of a flavour to get a feel for whether you really want to pursue that career path. But there are things that we could do to incentivise businesses to encourage more activity in school and greater work experience in the workplace. Workplace experience at an early age is critical.

Q83 **Anna Firth:** To follow up, what are the things that we could ask businesses to do that would further encourage them to offer work experience?

Steven Kearney: That is an interesting question. Everyone will have a different view. I guess it comes down to some recompense in terms of the time and cost that is incurred in taking that work experience through. Equally, it is about taking pupils who are really interested in the subject, as opposed to just wanting to have two weeks or one week out of school.



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You get that from that early introduction through a careers day. That used to be a thing. I have not been aware of them for some time. We tend to do a bit of post-16 at sixth form, but not at that younger age when you really want to start to get a feel for whether that is your area of interest, particularly around that time when you select which options to take and ultimately which GCSEs and A-levels you might want to pursue.

Anna Firth: Thank you. Matthew has his hand up.

Matthew McCarrick: I want to agree with some of the points. Lisa mentioned careers advice, which I think is lacking in schools. A lot of schools seem to be incentivised to head down the A-levels route. They don't seem to be pushing local college courses. The background to our entry in construction is apprenticeships. We don't have enough people heading towards apprenticeships because they are not advised at a young age. Again, as Steven has said, if we had a lot more work experience, if pupils were allowed to head into different industries to sample them, we would get people's interest at an earlier age. By 16, people have already decided what they don't want to do. They need careers advice from 10 upwards, and the potential to experience—it might not be a full week's work experience—a work placement so that they can experience industries.

Q84 **Anna Firth:** Thank you. Jane, I have a question that is specifically for you. Do you have a burning desire to jump in now or could we hear from you in a minute?

Jane Gratton: I am happy to contribute later. I endorse what everyone has said—the importance of schools and the business community working very closely together.

Q85 **Anna Firth:** I would like to ask a specific follow-up. I would really like to drill down into the detail and ask how each of you are actively engaging with your community or schools, and what is good practice, and what is good practice the other way. What are community groups and schools doing to engage with you that is particularly fruitful, in terms of allowing work experience or work days or any other sort of engagement to take place at an early stage? Shall I go back to you, Lisa, as you are nodding?

Lisa Silcock: That is fine. Naylor Industries are based in Barnsley. We have partnered with a school called Horizon—I think you introduced us to Horizon, Miriam. They have an incredible career education programme going. They reach out to a lot of businesses in the community and invite them into the school to do careers talks and careers fairs. We do mock interviews. They also have a STEM club, which is great for our industry. We have partnered up with the head of science and are doing talks and presentations in the STEM group. We have a really robust relationship with them, and it is working really well.

If more industries go into schools, it will open the eyes of young adults to what different sectors do. For example, I was speaking to the career adviser at Horizon school yesterday. Healthcare was very much in the public eye over the covid pandemic, and young adults and children learned



a lot about it; she felt that there was a big rise in pupils interested in the sector. Other industries that are struggling at the moment include agriculture and logistics. If they came into schools and explained more about what their sector does, they might get more engagement from young people.

Anna Firth: That is very interesting—thank you. If you have already made points, and you don't want to add any more, don't feel that you have to come back in.

Chris Pont: In Ipswich, we are lucky enough to have the Creative Computing Club. It is obviously centred around technology. It seems a bit silly to call it a club now actually, because it is more of an academy. It is run by Matthew Applegate, who teaches about 350 kids a week at the moment. He is just about to scale that up to 600. He is doing some inspirational work. We work with him in raising funds to allow children to make it through. He takes some particularly troubled young teenagers off the streets and gets them to pass an A-level computing exam, which is incredible. His average grade is between an A and an A*. We work with him to raise funds. We do some teaching. We do the odd module here and there to teach the children about what is happening in the industry. We are just talking to him at the moment about taking on some placement students for work experience and for the eventual T-levels.

Anna Firth: That is fantastic, Chris. Thank you. We only have five more minutes. Caroline, did you want to come in?

Caroline Ansell: I noticed Peter had his hand up, so I am keen to hear from him, but I do want to come in on work experience, if I may.

Peter Cadwallader: One of the things I have done in the past that I thought was really useful for both parties was that I have gone into schools and done presentations about my career and about how I have got to where I have got to. I feel that one of the things that students and children need are aspirations. They need mentor figures and to be able to understand how people got from A to B. On the back of that, I have had quite a few really enthusiastic people who reached out to me. I found that really helped because that is the kind of person who I would look to take on—someone who was proactive and who showed a genuine interest in something that I was doing.

Anna Firth: Fantastic.

Q86 **Caroline Ansell:** In a previous life, I was a director of studies and head of year 11, which meant organising the work experience programme, which, even 15 to 20 years ago, was incredibly challenging. I recognise all of the constraints you are speaking of—the time and the costs. One thing that came up quite often was around insurance.

In the context of small businesses particularly, can you see any kind of new initiative or innovation where small businesses can perhaps collaborate rather more to shield themselves from some of those costs or burdens? How do we bridge the gap? From a previous session, everyone



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agrees that work experience is central, but I think it is only 10% of businesses who currently offer work experience, so there is a huge disparity. How do we better bridge that?

Anna Firth: Thank you, Caroline. That is an absolutely excellent question, but I will only allow one person to answer it because I have other questions I want to ask. Does anybody want to put their hand up and offer an answer to that?

Jane Gratton: It can be difficult for very small firms to have the capacity to have somebody mentoring a young person as they may need a lot of support when they are in the workplace. It is probably easier for the larger SMEs and larger firms to do.

One thing the pandemic has shown us is that we can be creative about this. An employer can use technology to reach a lot of young people through a lot of schools; they can record one session that can be shared with lots of young people. Lots of our employers, through the chambers of commerce, are also now using technology to reach more people. They can also set real-life projects for young people to do, so they experience how their learning can be applied in the workplace setting without necessarily having to be in a workplace setting—although obviously, the more they can get behind the scenes of businesses, the better.

Q87 **Anna Firth:** That is really interesting. If people have other reflections on that question and want to write in afterwards, please feel free. The last question is to you, Jane. Will local skills improvement plans provide the right level and type of involvement for employers in shaping local skills provision?

Jane Gratton: They are definitely a step in the right direction. The evidence of our independent workplace training and development commission, and of our quarterly economic survey and workforce surveys, is that there is a disconnect at the moment—that firms are disengaging from the skills system. At the same time, there are record numbers of firms with recruitment difficulties and skills shortages, so we firmly believe that LSIPs can help.

We were delighted and very proud that the chambers of commerce ran the eight LSIP pilots across the country recently. They engaged, at a very deep level in many cases, more than 10,000 businesses across that period and really helped businesses to think through their role in the skills system. They are trying to get them to articulate their needs for not only now but further ahead. We learned that a lot of firms are not planning more than six or 12 months ahead, so it is really important that we support businesses to think further ahead—at how industry trends, net zero, automation and digitisation will affect them—and then bring them together with training providers and the education system to prepare young people for that.

Anna Firth: Thank you, Jane. I have about 30 seconds for Tom.

Q88 **Tom Hunt:** Very quickly, I know that LSIPs are mainly focused on trying



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to influence the FE curriculum. Do you think they could actually go further and look at LSIPs to influence the school curriculum as well, and some of the things going on in schools?

Jane Gratton: I very much think they do, because we are talking to businesses about the skills and behaviours we need for young people entering the workforce, and for post-16 and our existing adult workforce that needs upskilling and reskilling. It is a really exciting time; we are at the beginning of having those conversations and shaping provision.

Q89 **Tom Hunt:** I think that, at the moment, the focus is not so much on schools—understandably, to an extent. I was just wondering whether you think there should be more of an explicit role for those plans in looking to influence what goes on in secondary schools and potentially even primary schools.

Jane Gratton: I think we have a lot to do on the post-16 side, and it will take a long time for that to feed through. Businesses are impatient; they have got involved in the conversation, and already they want to see what changes are happening there. However, inevitably, as part of those conversations, they are talking about what they need from young people, so I think we will have that influence over time in the schools and skills sectors.

Chair: I will pass over to Miriam, who will chair the next section, on post-16 qualifications.

Q90 **Miriam Cates:** Thank you, Chair. This section is about the post-16 landscape. I suppose the biggest change in recent years has been the Government's emphasis on T-levels, their flagship programme. The idea is to balance the academic-knowledge side of education with some really valuable workplace experience. To what extent do you think T-levels will meet that gap, particularly the gap in formal work experience that you have talked about? Do you think they are a good idea, and what are the risks and challenges? It would be helpful to know who has had direct experience of T-levels, so can you raise your hand if you have? Nobody? Okay, I will go to Jane first for the wider picture.

Jane Gratton: We are very supportive of T-levels. We have long called for a quality alternative to the A-level—something that has rigour and quality and that is employer-backed. We think that they are definitely part of the solution to the skills shortages, and we are very much behind them.

In terms of industry placement, it is extremely important that young people can apply the knowledge that they have learned through the academic side, the technical education side, and apply it in a workplace setting. It will give employers confidence when they are recruiting that young people understand what the role, the job and the sector are all about.

T-levels are important, but awareness is still very low at the moment; they were launched and then we had the pandemic. They were not all launched



together, so at the moment they are not available everywhere in the country. It will take time, but we think they are a very positive step.

- Q91 Miriam Cates:** Do you think there are any challenges—particularly for the FE sector, which has to organise the work experience—in delivering the sheer number of hours of work experience? I think it is 350 hours per T-level student. Do you think that is a challenge, and can it be overcome?

Jane Gratton: I think it is a challenge. The flexibility that was introduced for sharing a work placement will definitely help. The employer incentive—the financial incentive—certainly helps. As my colleagues said earlier, it will help to reduce some of the cost of having that member of staff—someone in a T-level placement who is just over 16 will need a lot of support and mentoring in the workplace setting.

As I said, I think employers will gain awareness and confidence. With support to help them through the administration and the practicalities of offering a T-level, as well as some financial support to help them bear the cost, we will see growth in industry placements.

- Q92 Miriam Cates:** Thank you. Chris, the computer science T-level is one of the first initiatives. Are you aware of it, and have you been approached to take on a student? What are your thoughts about it?

Chris Pont: I am aware of it because of my own research; I have not been approached about it. I think it falls into the digital category of T-levels. I am aware of it and think it looks good; there is some great benefit in doing it, both for the student and for employers.

For the student who has been very structured throughout their young life, coming into a business where they maybe have a bit more autonomy gives them time in industry and a taster of what to expect. I have had work placement students stand at my desk asking, “Can I go to lunch now?” Suddenly, they are given a bit of autonomy and are not being told exactly what to do and when.

For the business, particularly in our industry, to have somebody there who is asking “Why?” all the time, somebody has to teach them. Our more senior staff benefit because it gets them to question their own way of working, why they have done things that way, and whether it is the best way of doing things. Suddenly, they can take a different approach.

- Q93 Miriam Cates:** So they are adding value to your organisation as well as deriving a lot of value from it.

Chris Pont: Absolutely. But also, recruitment is incredibly expensive. If you can approach people at a young age, and keep in touch if they look promising, you have given them a taster of what to expect from your company, and when they do eventually come into industry, hopefully they choose your business. There are some great benefits there for businesses as well.

Miriam Cates: Andy, you are nodding.



Andy Webb: I would agree with all those points. I think that a large chunk of work experience within industry is an essential skill to have when you finish your education. That is why the apprenticeship system works so well, because you get the blend and balance of the academic and the skills. I think you mentioned earlier that, when a degree student finishes education, their employability is not always great because they do not have that work experience skill—they do not know what a working environment looks like. Bringing it back to the T-level, that blend of skills and academic learning is a great thing. In terms of employability, maybe the student comes back to your company, which saves the employment costs—I think that is fantastic. It works both ways.

Q94 **Miriam Cates:** That is brilliant. Just to widen it up to what the potential for post-16 education is, and whether we can think more creatively, a lot of you seem to be saying that it does not matter when someone starts work—whether they are 16, 18, or at 21 after graduation or 26 after a PhD—what they are often lacking is workplace skills. Obviously, there are some jobs where you need a vocational qualification, or a very academic one—medicine, law, architecture—but there are other jobs where you can learn the skills you need on the job with a properly structured training course. Do you think the school leaving age is too high? Should we reduce it to 16 and plough some of the money that is being spent on further and higher education into small businesses, to give you the flexibility to provide that kind of training—or do you value the partnership with the more academic institutions?

Peter Cadwallader: I would make two points. First, I do not think it matters what age it is that they are getting into employment, on a broad level. I am a great believer in the 80-20 principle, and the fundamental thing that no one has mentioned—although all these ideas sound great—and the thing that will add the biggest value to these people, is for them to have much better maths and English. I employ people who are school leavers and do not go on to further education, and their maths and English is, in some instances, horrendous. They are not going to have a decent chance in life if they have not got the basic principles sorted on those two elements. I wanted to mention that.

Secondly—I hope this is answering the question—my background is as a lawyer, and I did a training contract. The training contract was brilliant because you did different seats in different areas to try and find out what area of law you wanted to specialise in. I think that something similar could be applied to school leavers. We also did some real basic skills: we learned advocacy; we learned about accounts; we learned all the different skills that you need to run a business and to work with business. We had mentors who we could go to for support, and who we could look up to and aspire to be like. I think that mixture was such a good grounding, but I could not have done any of that unless I had the absolute basics, which are maths and English.

Q95 **Miriam Cates:** Thank you. Can I bring you in, Lisa? When I visited Naylor Industries, I was blown away by the range of different jobs that are available. A lot of them are well skilled and highly paid. If you can get



students interested at 16 or 18, you can provide that training and formal education at the same time. What changes would you like to see to make that easier for businesses like yours?

Lisa Silcock: At the moment, we are a big advocate for the apprentice programme—that seems to work for us. For example, in the technical office, we are recruiting somebody at 16 years old, but the plan is to develop them right up to degree level. I do not know if that answers your question. The apprentice scheme has the combination of working in the role and the theory side as well. That is working for us at the moment.

Q96 **Miriam Cates:** Is there anything that could be done to improve the apprenticeship offering?

Lisa Silcock: Before I came here today, I did speak to the apprentices to get their side of things as well. When they were making their choices at school-leaving age, they didn't know that they could do a degree at apprentice level, and nor did their friends. Going back to my original point, the traditional route is very much spoken about in schools, with A-levels and degrees, but not always the different routes that you can take. The apprentices that we've got did not want to go down that traditional route. They found out themselves about the apprentice scheme. It is a nice combination. We have a lot of apprenticeships that are at degree level.

Q97 **Miriam Cates:** Brilliant. Steven, can I bring you in? It is slightly different with architecture. You really do need those formal qualifications. How could the post-16 route be improved?

Steven Kearney: I think the T-levels are a very good idea. They are a pre-lead to architecture apprenticeships, which was a relatively new theme introduced in 2020. It encourages much more inclusivity. Studying architecture is a long and very expensive process, and the architecture apprenticeship cuts down that exposure. You get real, practical experience all the way through. The great shame at present is that there are only two universities allowing level 6 in the UK—Portsmouth and South Bank—so it is very hard to get that initial establishment on the level 6 course, but the introduction of T-levels might help the universities develop more programmes. It's very positive.

Q98 **Miriam Cates:** Thank you. Final question: one organisation that gave evidence to us suggested that a new baccalaureate system would be needed for learners between 15 and 18—a GCSE to A-level equivalent—that would include academic, applied, and technical pathways to allow young people to specialise at an earlier point, and then really focus on the skills that they need. What are your views on that? And do you have any final comments in terms of reforms that you think need to be made?

Chair: Can I just add to what Miriam said? We tell students they have to stay in school until they are 18 unless they are doing an apprenticeship, which they can do from 16. We have academic GCSEs at the age of 16 and then we allow them to narrow to the age of 18 with academic A-levels, and we offer a binary choice of vocational T-levels. There is another option, as Miriam has just said. First, you possibly don't have GCSEs, but



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you might have some exams just to test progression at the age of 16. You would then have an International Baccalaureate, as in about 150 other countries, often with better skill levels than we have—the career baccalaureate, as it is called—where you combine technical, vocational and academic education. You would do that at 18 and not have this narrowing that happens with A-levels.

Miriam Cates: Can we bring Matthew in on that first? He might also have some comments on the last question.

Matthew McCarrick: On the last question, I am not familiar with the baccalaureate, but apprenticeships work. We were established in the '50s and have been taking apprentices on for years and years. They work for us. Apprentices go into trades, into management and into directorships of our company—our board of directors has ex-apprentices who have been with us for over 40 years.

I don't know about baccalaureates. I can see a place for T-levels in certain industries but, for construction, apprenticeships work. We don't want to dumb down the skillsets of people or expect too much of people's skillsets. I have heard that you would be able to head into a course at level 3 for a T-level. If you had academic qualifications, you could head into a course at level 3. I don't think anyone would want a carpenter starting at level 3 without any formal education at all. For us, for the career route of trades, apprenticeships work as they are. We just need to have more of them. We need to have them in more wide-ranging job roles.

Q99 **Miriam Cates:** Brilliant. Thank you. Peter, do you want to make any comments on a potentially different route?

Peter Cadwallader: The point I want to make is that I don't see any point in putting a 16-year-old through GCSEs if they are going to come out with 10 Es or whatever it is. All that does is completely ruin their self-worth, confidence and any aspirations they have. You can identify if someone is academic well before that point, and we should put them on the route of apprenticeships, which are a brilliant idea. We have done apprenticeships; they are wonderful. Don't change them; they're great. We need to look at the individual and build up their confidence and skillset for the things that they will actually do in the future.

Q100 **Miriam Cates:** Brilliant; thank you. Does anybody else have any comments on the potential for a baccalaureate?

Jane Gratton: We are very supportive of the university technical college scenario whereby young people study a mix of academic and technical. Again, the learning is applied and contextualised, and the destination outcomes are impressive for those young people—they go on to apprenticeships or into jobs and so on.

Employers value the academic and the technical. I think we need to do more on the academic side to make young people who take that route more work-ready. On the technical side, we need more people going into a technical route. Although we have not surveyed our members on the



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baccalaureate as such, I think we need to do more to get more young people into technical options. As my colleague just said, it is better for them, for their learning style and for their interest.

We must make sure that we have post-16 pathways for people at all skill levels, so that they can progress. We need more people with higher-level technical skills. It is about getting everybody on the journey and then progressing them through. Whatever system we have, it should get the best out of people for their learning style and their abilities and allow them to progress as far as they are capable.

Q101 Chair: It was interesting that when Miriam started by asking about T-levels, only one of you wanted to comment. Jane, your survey—the British Chambers of Commerce survey—says that something like only 9% of businesses will offer industry placements, and that only 12% of employers have any awareness of T-levels. You seem to have confirmed in your responses today that that is the case. What should be done to change that? Placements are a major plank of the Government’s proposal for T-levels, so what should the Government be doing so that more businesses are aware of T-levels and offer work placements?

Chris Pont: I think the outreach programme really needs to improve. Training providers, universities, schools and so on run careers days, but they quite often rely on employers visiting them. They could go to small businesses and say, “This is what we are running. This is the sort of thing you can do. This is what you need to do to take a student on a work placement or a T-level. And these are the benefits to your business.” That would massively improve the uptake. Spreading awareness of what is possible, and including some case studies from other businesses, would be great.

Andy Webb: Could it possibly be something that is bolted together with the apprenticeship service? At the moment, outreach for the apprenticeships is huge. All the businesses know about the website; we all apply when we are looking to recruit apprentices. Could it be something that is offered at the same time to employers who are taking on apprentices? That is the portal that we all go to, really, so it is a good central place.

Chair: Anyone else? No? Okay. I will pass over to Apsana, who will chair the final session, on apprenticeships.

Q102 Apsana Begum: As the Chair said, this next and final session is about apprenticeships. They are something that our Committee covers a lot, and they are also a personal passion for the Chair. We have talked a little about what more could be done to promote apprenticeships, but I want to get your views on whether schools are doing enough to promote technical and vocational post-16 options to their students. If not, what more do you think could be done?

Jane Gratton: From polling our members, we know that one of the barriers to apprenticeships is the lack of candidates. They have jobs and not enough candidates coming forward, so to me that indicates that young



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people are potentially not being given all the information or understanding all the different career routes open to them. I noticed when I was walking past my local high school that there is a big banner outside saying, "X% of our students go on to university." I would like one that says, "and X% go on to really good quality apprenticeships."

Chair: Hear, hear. Absolutely.

Q103 **Apsana Begum:** One thing that came up in your survey, which I think was during the pandemic, was that despite us being in a pandemic and maybe having opportunities to explore other types of education, there still seemed to be a lot more promotion of the academic route. I want to understand a little more why you think that might be. Do you think the country is moving too slowly in changing perceptions about education? Do you think we are just not there yet and not moving fast enough in addressing and expanding our understanding of other types of education, and promoting that at all levels in society?

Jane Gratton: I think you are right. The level of skill shortages at the moment is very serious. Three in four firms that we surveyed recently were struggling to fill their job vacancies. When we asked them what sort of jobs and skills, it is technical skills that they are looking for. So we know this is pervasive and acute, and we need to do something about that. It is how we get that parity and how we get schools, young people and parents to recognise the value of technical routes.

Businesses need to work with schools and, as I said earlier, I think the LSIP process will help with that, but for many years chambers have been bringing businesses and schools together, helping people and school leaders to understand the value that employers place on vocational and technical routes.

As to the extent to which our schools are incentivised or measured in terms of the technical and apprenticeship routes that they bring forward, the Baker clause is very useful. It is certainly a useful start in making sure that alternative providers can get in front of young people and parents, and make sure that they understand these things, but we have a long way to go. The apprenticeship is very highly thought of by businesses now. It is good quality and a brilliant route for young people, accelerating them into some really good careers.

Apsana Begum: The point you just made about parity is really important for us in the Committee. I will come next to you, Matthew, as I can see your hand is up.

Matthew McCarrick: I don't think apprenticeships are promoted sufficiently in schools. I think schools are incentivised to push people down the A-levels route. They are measured and have targets to follow, and they are almost insularly keeping the students in their schools—"Stay here. Do the A-level route"—as opposed to even considering the local college.



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For us, we deal directly—we are a small SME—with local colleges and schools, mostly in the north-east. If we are doing that, presumably other construction companies and other companies are doing the same. There are a lot of resources involved in us dealing with these companies directly. If there were a central liaison, where we could say that we need four bricklayers or four plumbers or, vice versa, where and the college said, “We’ve got these people on our course and we need placements for them”—a central resource to work all that through—it would speed up a lot of the process.

We carry out apprenticeships in various trades. Often, an apprentice needs to carry out various different roles over the course of their apprenticeship. Some employers are concerned that they can’t fulfil those roles and therefore that they won’t be able to give the education to the apprentice. I am part of a collective within the north-east called the Northern Counties Builders Federation. Within the bursary scheme they offer, we commit that if we can’t provide certain elements of an apprentice’s education, other members will. So we are doing that role collectively within the north-east, but if there were a central liaison that carried out the interface between the education provider and the employer, it could be a lot more streamlined and it might encourage more employers to get into offering apprenticeships.

Apsana Begum: Thank you. I will take a question from Tom.

Q104 **Tom Hunt:** I have a question for all the panellists about whether you have a university local to you, particularly for very high-level skills and qualifications that could aid your business. How co-operative have you found that local university? What has been your interaction with them? Have you always found they are focused in the right way?

Lisa Silcock: We have a partnership, or we work with AMRC in Sheffield University. They have been very co-operative. We have sourced quite a few apprenticeships, worked with them and advertised the vacancies through them, and we have always had a very good take-up of the applicants. However, when we have gone to colleges, they have not always been as helpful—maybe they do not have the right course for what we are looking for. It depends whether they have the course.

Chris Pont: We are just putting in place the final parts for our next cohort of degree-level apprentices. We are keen that our apprentices stay local. With university, as well as it being that first step into life without your parents, it does wonders for your social life and it means you get to interact with your cohort. We were keen that our apprentices stayed local.

We have had level 3 and 4 apprentices in the past, where they have gone to an on-site training provider for a one-week intense course. They do that every few months. Again, we were keen they went to the local university. One of the stumbling blocks we had was that they said they would only accept apprentices for levy-paying companies. They said that the 5% that we needed to pay could only come through the levy. We said, “Is it possible that you could just invoice us for that amount?” We know it is



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possible; we have had PhD students in the past from that uni and they have invoiced us, but they said, “No, we will only accept levy-paying apprentices.” Obviously, as a small organisation, we are not paying into the levy; our payroll is not at £3 million.

What we did find in the end was that the local council, who is actually one of our clients, would be part of the levy transfer programme, so we could transfer and make use of some of their unused levy, which was great. The stumbling block we now have is that there is a large plc in the Ipswich area that provides quite a number of candidates for that course, but they are now dictating when that course gets run. Suffolk County Council is saying to us that they need to know the dates when the tuition happens so we can do the levy transfer, but currently we do not know, because this large plc is dictating when the course will be run. They are the stumbling blocks at the moment. It is a bit of an admin headache, but we are getting through it.

Q105 Chair: On the 20% off-the-job training, when I meet companies in Harlow, they often go on about that and say it is a problem because it takes the apprentice away from the workplace. Do you agree with the 20%? Is it difficult? If you do not, how would you change it?

Andy Webb: We have a slight problem with the new apprenticeship standard, which has primarily been derived from large business and it does not fit our small business model. We have had to adopt the apprenticeship, because that is the only one available. I guess because we are aviation-specific, that narrows it down, too.

Our apprentices are following a four-year apprenticeship scheme. A small business like us is more responsive and reactive to the training that we can give our apprentices. We find that our apprentices become competent after year 3. The standard is a four-year standard, which is excessive to keep our apprentices in a programme. Also, our year 3 apprentices this year have spent 40% of their time at college, which, for a small business like us has been really inhibitive and problematic.

Q106 Chair: Is that Harlow College?

Andy Webb: Stansted Airport College. That is down to the syllabus again, which has been derived from large business that can afford—

Q107 Chair: What should happen instead, if you do not agree with the 20%?

Andy Webb: I think the 20% is fine and fair, but it is when it is being dictated by larger businesses. There is no flexibility in the apprenticeship scheme. There needs to be more of a modular route for small business to interface into that scheme, rather than this rigid structure and framework that is derived and put together by large business.

Q108 Apsana Begum: Thank you. We are actually on the topic that I wanted to ask about. I want to get a further sense of what barriers each of your organisations is facing in offering apprenticeships. The Committee has received evidence submissions about the need to modernise apprenticeship programmes and, on the other end, from the employer,



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about the fact that the need to have standards regularly reviewed and updated is sometimes a barrier. How much is that an issue for your organisations in offering apprenticeships? Also, we on the Committee think—certainly the submissions received during our inquiry have shown this—that while awareness is generally quite high, the issue is the take-up and completion rates. I want to get a sense, either in terms of your organisation or from your perspective across different sectors, of how much of an issue low completion rates are and what would help employers bring those rates up.

Andy Webb: For our small business, completion rates have been fine. Being a small business, we are almost like a family. We support each other and all work together closely. We have good interpersonal links, which creates a bond within the business that bonds the apprentices with us. The completion rates have been fine in our business. That has not been an issue.

On reforming or reviewing the apprenticeship structure in the scheme, it is pretty much what I've just mentioned: having more of a modular-type system and more of an adaptable system where small businesses can feed in and perhaps tweak modules or adjust the standard to fit the business. I know that might be quite a difficult aspect to look at, when you consider the number of small businesses in the country, but some companies will fit straight into the apprenticeship standard framework. Specialist companies like us, however, will need more of a tailored, dedicated syllabus putting together. Having that opportunity to mould and form the apprenticeship standard ourselves would be massively beneficial.

Steven Kearney: Interestingly enough, we get lots of requests for postgraduate work experience. However, bearing in mind that, as I said earlier, architectural apprenticeships are relatively new—they have been two years in the making—we haven't yet had a single applicant who wants to undertake an architectural apprenticeship. Before I came today, I looked on the RIBA website, architecture.com, and there is one architectural apprenticeship nationally being advertised—a single one.

One barrier is that architectural courses are over-subscribed; they have been since long before I studied architecture. There is, therefore, always a supply going into the profession. There are other barriers to architectural apprenticeships and why people are not forthcoming, and I guess some of that is lack of knowledge. It is not widely publicised. As was mentioned earlier, I am not aware that it is something that is discussed in schools or further education establishments as being a process into the profession. Knowledge and awareness are the first thing. The profession also needs to be encouraged to take apprenticeships. From our point of view, it is a really good thing. It is very hard to recruit. Particularly given our proximity to London, where it is much more glamorous and attractive to practise, I think an architectural apprenticeship would be a really good thing for a practice like ours.

Lisa Silcock: To be fair, we tend to have quite a good take-up of the apprenticeship scheme. We advertise through the universities or colleges



that run the courses that we require. On the school side, it probably needs to be promoted a bit more. We need to provide information to young adults and their parents so that they understand what the apprentice scheme is and so that they have options and different pathways to follow. Depending on the school, I don't think that is always the case. However, from a take-up point of view, because we have advertised it in universities and colleges, we have not had too much of a struggle.

Q109 Apsana Begum: We have heard that other countries, such as Norway, have intermediaries supporting businesses to share apprentices. How could that work in England? We have heard about things such as group training associations that could support small businesses, particularly by pooling training resources. Do you think that would be good for us in England?

Jane Gratton: Chambers of commerce in the past have run apprenticeship training agencies that have received external funding to support the administration, and they have had some really good results. The flexi-apprenticeship scheme is being trialled at the moment, and one of our chambers in mid-Yorkshire is piloting one of those programmes. It works where you have sectors—creative, or construction in some cases—where smaller businesses cannot provide all the experience that the young person needs to complete the apprenticeship. As you were saying earlier, as part of a collective, you can share the apprentice's experience over a number of employers, and they can get all the experience they need.

Q110 Apsana Begum: I guess it is also about sharing responsibility around mentoring and supervision. It is down to the employer to provide that.

Jane Gratton: Certainly when they are in place, but the apprenticeship agency itself would have a continuing role in supporting the apprentice and the employer throughout the process. I think it can work, but it would need to be funded.

Q111 Apsana Begum: My next question is about degree apprenticeships. How can we improve the take-up of apprenticeships among young people? We are very aware of the trend of older apprenticeships at higher skill levels.

Lisa Silcock: It is about providing information to young adults that there is that route. I suppose it has to go through schools. Sorry, I am repeating what I said previously. Young adults can take different pathways at 16-plus onwards, and they need to know that there is that route: the apprentice scheme at degree level.

Andy Webb: It is also about breaking the stigma of apprenticeships. As we briefly spoke about earlier, schools pride themselves on the number of students who go through the A-level route and on to university, but it is also about breaking the stigma that the apprenticeship route is the lesser of the educational routes. It is almost about putting apprenticeships up on a pedestal and making them more attractive to young adults.

Matthew McCarrick: There is an element of age discrimination in apprenticeships. We have had some fantastic older apprentices over the



years. However, the employer is burdened with a far larger cost of employing someone as an older apprentice, so a lot of companies are put off by the additional cost and opt for employing someone younger. If there was levelling up provided by the Government, so that all apprentice costs were the same, regardless of the age of the individual, there would not be that discrimination.

Q112 Apsana Begum: Is there an incentive for employers to offer degree apprenticeships if there is less scrutiny? Some of the evidence shows there is less scrutiny if they are offering degree apprenticeships with older age groups. Generally, are those doing degree apprenticeships less socially diverse than students doing the same sort of subjects at university? Is that why people are not opting for degree apprenticeships?

Matthew McCarrick: Shall I go on diversity there? Within construction, our local colleges take on 2% female and 98% male. There's a hell of a lot of the population that we're missing out on in terms of employing women in construction.

Q113 Apsana Begum: That's a big problem. I have a couple more questions. Just on the apprenticeship levy—I think some of this was alluded to earlier—what reform, if any, do you think should be made to this levy? Things have been said and commitments made by the Government in terms of reviewing it. It may not be a formal review, but certainly in the spring statement this year, there was talk about trying to ensure more flexibility in training and so on. I just want to get your views on that.

Chris Pont: I think, as a small business, I would make the point I made earlier about the restrictions around the levy and making sure that we can access all training providers and it's not just the ones who pay into the levy, because that's a big restriction. There have definitely been some bits for us to overcome in putting our apprenticeship programme in place. I think the rest of it works, in general. Flexibility around being able to choose training providers, choose where that training happens and choose what sort of training happens is a big factor as well.

Q114 Apsana Begum: Do you think that the current system with the levy leaves it too open for people to criticise the employer themselves, as opposed to looking at what support there is from the Government?

Chris Pont: Sorry, how do you mean?

Q115 Apsana Begum: Because the burden is on them. They get some of the money from the Government, to top up, but really it's down to the employer to deliver and meet the Government standard. Does that leave it too open for employers themselves to be criticised?

Chris Pont: I'm not really sure on that point, to be honest.

Jane Gratton: I think, sometimes, employers are unfairly criticised for using their levy money to upskill older adults in the workplace. It is their levy money and they want to use it to upskill their current workforce.

Q116 Apsana Begum: They are not necessarily recruiting new—



Jane Gratton: They are not necessarily recruiting new if there aren't the vacancies there. What we need to do is ensure the system allows employers to recruit and train, and to upskill people who are already in the workforce. And apprenticeships are a great way of doing it. Just to echo what was said earlier, the more modularisation we can get into the system, the better. Particularly in an SME, where a person may have a number of roles, using the apprenticeship system more flexibly so that they can use the particular modules for the particular roles that they need and still have a valued qualification would be useful. Our evidence says employers are very much looking for quality modularisation of qualifications at the moment. But as I said earlier, employers really do value apprenticeships. Very often with the degree-level apprenticeships, they might take someone who has been working with them for a while and then put them through a degree-level apprenticeship programme as they see the potential in someone and use it to develop them.

Q117 **Tom Hunt:** On the point about gender balance, I know that the construction industry is 98% male, but my sense is that it's not actually just construction where there is a real gender imbalance in terms of participants. I know that the tech sector is quite male dominated as well. I'm not sure about the other sectors. I just want to know whether you think there is a problem and a piece of work needs to be done—yes, about promoting apprenticeships generally, but maybe making a particular effort when it comes to promoting apprenticeships to women and girls, because it seems to me that there are many imbalances, not just an imbalance in the construction sector.

Chris Pont: It is definitely a problem in the tech sector, although it is getting better; I think the balance has shifted in the last couple of decades. So I would agree with your point: I think it's something where we need to improve the uptake.

Jane Gratton: It needs to start way back in school—at primary school, really. It's about making sure that all the students are aware of the different routes and the different types of careers, and that young women in particular are made to feel excited—

Q118 **Tom Hunt:** What is it about apprenticeships, though, that may have caused them to fall into this position? Is it because apprenticeships are seen as practical and technical? Is there something about that? I don't know; it just seems—I guess for tech and digital work I can maybe get it, but I'm just intrigued to know what this disparity—

Chris Pont: I am not entirely sure, really. Traditionally, decades ago, it was seen as a male industry. I think that, in many ways, some of the stigma that you spoke about earlier sits with the parents as well; parents have a big influence over where their kids progress. I think that some parents see an apprenticeship as potentially leading back to the old YTS schemes, and things like that. It has that stigma attached. Parents will have a big influence on where their children end up.



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Lisa Silcock: Is there a way that schools can be measured on the apprentice or technical route as well? At the moment, they are just being measured on A-levels and people going to university. I think Jane commented earlier on how one school had a big banner outside saying there were x number of people going to university. Could we bring measures into schools where they are gauged on the technical or apprentice routes as well?

Q119 **Apsana Begum:** I have one final question. In a nutshell, how can we best incentivise businesses to develop and offer the volume and type of high-quality apprenticeships that we need? We can take one or two points from everyone.

Andy Webb: How do we incentivise business to deliver high-quality apprenticeships? I think it is about working closely with schools and bringing them in with business to feed in the right students to the apprenticeship programme. I think a high-quality apprenticeship programme will only provide great results with great candidates coming through the system. We are probably covering old ground again; it is all about starting early with young people, giving them inspiration and moulding their passions and interests. You will get a section of those people who will naturally want to move towards the skilled trades, but they may not know that at that point. By allowing that to develop and grow early on in schools, I think they will come through the system. The employer will then have a better pool, which will be a bigger incentive for them to take on apprentices and grow their programmes.

Lisa Silcock: I suppose my answer is the same as Andy's really. I think there is some inconsistency in schools with career education. We are an engineering company, and we have the same lack of ladies in engineering. It is about engaging with schools, having extracurricular activities and focusing on different industries so that information is provided to the pupils.

Chris Pont: It is about showing businesses the outcomes. The point I touched on earlier was about how it can affect the thinking of more senior and experienced staff, but, also, having young people involved in a business can fundamentally change the culture of that business. Having that enthusiasm, passion and curiosity can really affect how a business operates. That, and making it as easy as possible.

Matthew McCarrick: To incentivise businesses, we have found that it often ties into a supply shortage of labour. We have spoken to local colleges, and they have said that they are lacking lecturers because lecturers are going back into the industry as wages are going up—they are more incentivised to go back into practice. If businesses were incentivised to offer their skilled and older workforce to work with local colleges—maybe part-time employed, part-time working for the college—there is a lot of knowledge that could be transferred down to the young apprentices. That would hopefully encourage more apprentices and stop the skills shortage.



Apsana Begum: That is an interesting point.

Q120 **Angela Richardson:** I have got a question rounding up everything that we have been talking about this morning. We are talking about the world of work and about our post-16 qualifications and, particularly, skills. In your view, from running your own businesses, will the future of that world of work for our young people be in person, working from home or a hybrid? It is topical.

Steven Kearney: I will go first if you don't mind because I have struggled with bringing people back into the office. The nature of what we do is very collaborative and hands on. We have lots of design studios in the office. We have lots of visits around our buildings that are being constructed at various stages for not just the graduate architects, but the more experienced ones, and I do not think you can do that at home. You have to be in the office space to do that. While I think some hybrid may well be the outcome as we begin to settle back into a more stabilised work pattern, for me personally and in our profession, I think it will very much still be studio and office-based, for sure.

Chris Pont: I think it is very industry specific. For my industry, it is going to be hybrid. We are changing our working space to adapt to that because people will now come to the office more to collaborate and work together. Rather than having rows and rows of desks, you will have more of a collaboration space with whiteboards, video screens, cameras and so on. Obviously, that presents challenges for running an apprenticeship programme, where it is much easier to show somebody sat next to you something on a screen than it is to try to teach them over a Teams call.

Lisa Silcock: I think hybrid as well. To be able to train somebody, you need to have them in the office. It is very difficult to do it over Teams or over video.

Matthew McCarrick: In construction, it is fairly obvious that you cannot dig a trench or build an airport from home. I started my education at work building shopping centres and what not in Manchester. What I learned in my 20s was what I absorbed from other people in the office I was working in. I was not on the tools; I was working in a professional capacity and absorbing a lot of information. I don't think that somebody in their 20s would have that experience working from home.

When someone is in their 40s or 50s and they know what they are doing—maybe doing an accounts role or something like that—and are very confident and competent in their role, they can do that from home. Graduates, apprentices and young people need to learn from their own experience and that of others, and that is not going to be easy if they are not interacting with people all the time.

Angela Richardson: Peter, you have your hand up.

Peter Cadwallader: What Matthew said, basically.

Q121 **Chair:** I have one final question. You talk about UTCs. I am a passionate



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supporter of university technical schools. I went to one last week in east London—Mulberry UTC. It was remarkable. It was not just doing STEM; it also has an art studio. Do you think the Government are doing enough to support UTCs and should there be more of them? Does it work having students start at 14, because students are 14 to 19? What could be done to further the cause of university technical schools around the country, working with businesses like these so that they interact with the schools and the students can do work experience with them?

Jane Gratton: Lots of questions there, but we are very supportive of UTCS, and lots of chambers have been involved in setting them up and in their leadership. They work and, as a colleague said earlier, what is the point of getting someone to do the academic route to GCSEs if they are not going to be excited or do well in that? The evidence that we have from our UTCs in local areas is that once people are in that applied, contextualised setting, they really flourish. It can ensure that they have the maths and the literacy skills that everybody needs, but also that they can apply that learning.

Employers really get behind that because they can see that young people are developing the skills that they need for the workplace. That is not only the basic maths, digital and literacy, but the curiosity that was mentioned earlier—that, “I want to know how things work and why they work”. That, I believe, and our members say, helps young people when they reach the workplace afterwards because if they come across something they have not seen before, they want to find a solution to it; they are natural problem solvers; they start to learn the critical thinking that we need in business.

Should we see some more UTCs? Yes. However, I would like all schools to have the same approach; I would like every young person to have the ability and option of doing more applied and contextualised learning so that they are more work-ready.

Q122 **Chair:** There is talk of this idea of not necessarily having a brand-new UTC school, but a UTC stream of education in every school, so that students who wanted to do that would have more of an opportunity to do so. What do you think of that?

Jane Gratton: I think our members would very much welcome that.

Chair: That is great. Thank you so much everyone. I love these kinds of sessions because we learn so much. You guys are at the coalface and know exactly what needs to be done. Members have really appreciated having you from individual constituencies around the country. We have learned a lot and will definitely reflect much of what you have said in our report when it comes out in a few months’ time—we have a few more sessions yet. I wish you all well, and I am looking forward to inviting my Harlow companies for a cup of coffee in my office after this. Thank you all very much.