

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Adult skills and lifelong learning](#), HC 22

Wednesday 23 October 2019

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Robert Halfon MP (Chair); Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell; Thelma Walker.

Questions 1 – 40

Witnesses

I: Baroness Wolf of Dulwich, Sir Roy Griffiths Professor of Public Sector Management, King's College London; John Holford, Robert Peers Professor of Adult Education, University of Nottingham; and Lyn Tett, Professor Emerita, University of Edinburgh, and Professor of Community Education, University of Huddersfield.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Professor John Holford \(ASL0076\)](#)



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Wolf of Dulwich, John Holford and Lyn Tett.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming today. Sadly, this room does not have a TV camera, but it has audio and so it will be recorded.

For the benefit of the tape and those listening on the internet, could you kindly introduce yourselves and your positions formally, from our left, please?

Baroness Wolf: All right. I am Alison Wolf. I am Professor of Public Sector Management at King's College London. I also, relevantly I think for this, was a member of the panel for the Augar review on post-18 education.

Lyn Tett: I am Lyn Tett. I am Professor of Community Education at the University of Huddersfield.

John Holford: I am John Holford. I am the Robert Peers Professor of Adult Education at the University of Nottingham.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much again. I am going to start off. How would you describe the state of adult learning in the UK today?

Lyn Tett: Briefly, it is in decline, with a big reduction in numbers. John has the figures. There are difficulties in funding.

John Holford: Yes, the situation is pretty bad. We have had a radical decline over the last 20-odd years in participation and that is linked to a radical decline in the provision of adult education, which is to do with considerable damage done to the kinds of institutions that should be providing—and used to provide—adult education of all kinds.

Also, there has been serious damage to the breadth of adult education offered. For example, in the 1990s, we spoke very much about lifelong learning and a learning society. That has, in practice, meant learning mostly for young adults and learning mostly of vocational skills. That is a very narrow basis for a learning society.

Q3 **Chair:** What are the fundamental reasons that there has been a decline in support? Is it Government policy? Is it a lack of cultural awareness? Is it emphasis being placed on other parts of the education system?

Baroness Wolf: Some of it has been accidental. I do not think anybody intended there to be the dramatic decline that there has been, for example, in part-time and in adult higher education. That was not intended and was not expected.

But quite a lot has been, in a way, deliberate. Every time there is a fight over resources, schools and higher education come first. There has also been an extremely narrow view of how further and adult education should



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be provided. It has been increasingly regulated and increasingly tied to very specific targets and so you have had a combination of declining funding and a very narrow objective set, which have not achieved what they set out to achieve, let alone anything else.

Lyn Tett: There has been a particular impact on community education and informal education that particularly aims to attract people who see learning as something that is not for them. The resources that are needed to persuade people that education is an important part of their lives are quite high and if those resources of staff are not around, people will not participate.

You have to think about lifelong learning as one of those goods. The more education you have had, the more attractive education is to you and the more likely you are to be able to find the resources and ability to find it; whereas if your experiences of education have not been good, as many people living in disadvantaged communities have experienced, then they need to see that it is useful for them. That takes some effort and it means that you have to target it, as Alison has helpfully argued, at the things that they are actually interested in—for example, their children.

John Holford: I agree with those points. One of the major problems that we have had is a fixation on vocational skills and on mechanisms that will deliver specific vocational skills, to the damage of the broader framework of adult education provision. Alison mentioned what has happened to higher and further education. That is absolutely right.

I will give you a very concrete example. Until 20-odd years ago, a lot of the older universities in the country had adult education departments devoted to engaging their institutions with the public. Now, with the exception of Oxford and Cambridge, which are well-heeled and have plenty of money to do this kind of thing, they have gone. That means that those universities no longer have contact at a grassroots level with the communities that surround them. They tend to see their educational role as being focused on 18 to 21-year-olds—the group that has just come out of school—and not on people throughout their lives. They need to reposition themselves to focusing on education for people throughout their lives.

That applies to some extent, although somewhat less so, to further education, which has been pushed to working and focusing on the young, rather than people throughout life.

Baroness Wolf: Could I come back in here? It is possibly quite important. I feel we are giving the wrong impression: that the vocational education part of it is fine, that all the focus is on vocational education, that vocational education is being funded successfully and that the problem areas are community, non-vocational and adult.

It would be a great mistake to give that impression. The vocational part of it is not working, either. Of course, part of lifelong learning is about



reskilling yourself. It is not just about enlarging your mind. The two go together. I want to be clear that the vocational part is also not working.

Chair: There are three parts. There is the community learning, which I am going to ask you about later and which is very important; there is higher education and full and part-time learning; and of course there is retraining, vocational education and reskilling, as you mentioned.

Q4 **Ian Mearns:** I am very much reflecting on what you have already said, coming from a local authority area that used to have not a perfect but a fairly good adult education service and community service. None of it exists anymore. I am thinking aloud and reflecting now. Isn't nostalgia wonderful?

What are the main purposes of adult skills and lifelong learning? What is the benefit? That might sound like a rhetorical question coming from someone like me, but it is for the record.

Baroness Wolf: It is to create the whole citizen. A whole citizen is a productive, politically active, caring and involved member of society. It is about all of those things. They go together to make the whole person.

Lyn Tett: Particularly in relation to the basic skills issues—literacy, numeracy, oracy, digital competency—adult education, adult skills and lifelong learning can do something to reverse the trajectory of disadvantage where current structures of inequality are pretty well enshrined. The more education you have had, the more likely you are to be able to access it. We have plenty of evidence of the impact of the wide range of provision—including vocational, which is very important—that enables people to participate in education that they need throughout their lives. Often, we concentrate on school education, but we must not forget that, especially in today's world, we need to be continuously upskilling ourselves and others.

Again, people have to want to do that. It does not work if people are cajoled into doing something. We need to think about it more broadly.

John Holford: I would add something else, which does not in any way contradict what has been said by Alison and Lyn.

I have been involved in the last year or so with an enterprise called the Centenary Commission on adult education, which is about making recommendations for the reconstruction of adult education in the spirit of the very famous—in our field—1919 Ministry of Reconstruction Report on Adult Education. I have a copy here. There you go. I shall show it to you for the record.

They were making recommendations at the time that British democracy was coming in for the first time. It was the first time that we began to get fairly near to universal adult suffrage. They said that adult education was fundamental to democratic life and that, if we do not have adult education and if we do not have an educated democracy, we will not have



a functioning democracy that is marked by well-informed citizens, decisions that are properly informed and debate that is critically tolerant but capable of being done without—I forget what the words were—cant and various things like that. That role of adult education as a key democratic institution has been lost in the last quarter century or so.

Q5 Ian Mearns: If all of that is in there, it is desperately in need of a reprint, is it not?

John Holford: It is. Next month, on the centenary of the publication of that, you will see the centenary report on adult education. It is chaired in 2019 by the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, Helen Ghosh. The 1919 one was also chaired by the Master of Balliol College, but at that stage it was somebody different—and a man, I should say.

Q6 Thelma Walker: Could I roll this back in a child's life to primary and secondary education? I have serious concerns at the moment about the narrowing of the curriculum to do with funding cuts and also the targets and tests culture for English and maths.

Although that is important in that journey in a child's life, going on to further and higher education perhaps and then adult education, do you see a correlation between people getting older and the choices they make and, because they have had a narrow curriculum when they are younger, they do not know what they do not know in terms of choosing the direction? Does that make sense?

Lyn Tett: Yes, it does. That is a great question. Direct correlations are always hard in this field, but I have done a lot of work in adult numeracy and literacy, and we have interviewed a lot of learners who range from about 25 to 60. The stories that they consistently tell are either of a lack of success at school and a feeling that whatever was being taught in school was not aimed at them or of some catastrophes happening to them in later life, like becoming drug users or homeless.

I cannot say that a narrow curriculum equals an unwillingness to engage in learning in later life, but I know in particular that the fact that young people now have to keep on in FE retaking those English and maths qualifications until they are able to pass them is certainly a big turnoff. They are interested in the vocational qualification. They want to be a plumber or a brickie or something. They do not see that English and maths are relevant. Of course, English and maths are absolutely vital and they are misinformed in one sense, but we can all have that experience of being forced to do something that we know we are not very good at. Of course, because of the way further education is funded in relation to positive outcomes, the resources that are available are concentrated on those who are nearly able to pass. There are issues around that.

I am not an expert on the school curriculum, but it seems to me from that information that the narrower the curriculum, the more likely it is that people are going to see it as not for them.



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Baroness Wolf: I would like to defend passionately the continuation of English and maths post-16. We now make young people stay in education, presumably because we think we know better than them. Otherwise, why do we not let them leave school at 11?

There are two issues here. There is whether something is taught well and there is whether it is taught. We know—which is why so many adults come to you for literacy and numeracy—that if you do not have a decent level of English and maths, everything in life is stacked against you. There was a period when, uniquely in Europe, we allowed our 16-year-olds, however poor their English and maths, to drop it totally. That was a scandal and I am very pleased to have had something to do with—

Q7 **Chair:** Do you still think it should be compulsory to do GCSE English and maths at every—

Baroness Wolf: No, I don't—it should be compulsory to do English and maths. GCSE is tremendously important. I think—

Q8 **Chair:** When they get to FE college, what should happen?

Baroness Wolf: What has happened is that the part of our current education policy that I think we have all referred to, which is this obsession with targets, outcomes and making people do things in a way where you can tick things off, has been very harmful, including in English and maths. In fact, if I was not here this morning, I would be at a working group on an alternative curriculum for 16 to 19-year-olds in maths. It might be worth emphasising how much of what has been going wrong has been related to this very narrow outcomes culture.

Earlier this century—and many people here will remember this—we had a huge campaign to improve adult literacy and numeracy, which was Skills for Life. It spent literally billions and financed a number of good things, but a huge amount of that money was effectively wasted because people were asked to tick off certificates. The more certificates you could tick off, the better. When you do that, you put people in for something they can already pass easily and you enrich the rewarding bodies.

Q9 **Chair:** If a child leaves school not having done well in English and maths and goes on to the next stage, whether it is an apprenticeship or FE college, what do you think should happen?

Baroness Wolf: We need a suite of curricula as, for example, happens in the Swedish system, which is pretty well sorted out in that respect, as is the German. Most other countries have a very clear set of alternative curricula that go right up to age 18. Depending on how well you have done before that, you go into one or the other.

Young people who have just missed a pass should definitely take it again, because there is no question that it is one of these passports that matters in life. There is some quite terrifying research about people who just



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missed a C—in the old system—compared to people who just got a C. Their paths diverge.

As was going to happen at one point—and I do not know quite how it got derailed—we need much more systematic thinking about the maths curriculum post-16 that takes it forward wherever you are at 16. We should be like the rest of Europe—everybody should do maths until we let them out.

Lucy Powell: I know that John needs to come in as well.

Baroness Wolf: Sorry, we got diverted from our topic. Sorry.

Q10 **Lucy Powell:** No, this is important. I completely agree with you. The evidence for levels of productivity, for life skills and so on, for continuing with English and maths post-16 and 16-to-18—compared with other OECD countries, ours was very low—is clear that people need to continue with that.

What we have heard a lot as a Committee has been a challenge. When you sit the very hard new GCSEs, alongside the comparable outcomes issue—so 40% every year have to fail—it is not like taking a driving test or sitting a music exam or something like that, where there is a point you get to and you pass. You are always being compared with that current cohort. That is currently that space.

I have seen a lot of evidence that over the last 15 years, since we have had a national literacy strategy in schools that has then impacted on parents, there has been quite a big improvement in adult literacy, whereas adult numeracy has stayed very low. That is a big challenge now. John, you wanted to say something.

John Holford: Not directly. I am on to the question of the breadth of the curriculum in school and its relationship to adult education. I would make two points.

One is that there is a lot of evidence internationally that broad curricula at school level are more effective in terms of the long-term maintenance of employment and so on than very narrow vocational curricula. I do not want to be seen as rubbishing vocational skills—far from it—but it is a question of breadth. Part of the reason for that is because, although if you focus on narrow vocational skills you can train people very well for a job that is there now, you are not able to put them in a position for the jobs that may be there in 10, 20 or 30 years' time. Because we predict but we do not know how the economy is going to develop, what jobs will be there and so on, we need to give people that breadth of knowledge that is important and allows them to adapt. There seems to be pretty strong evidence—

Thelma Walker: It is creative thinkers we need as well, isn't it?

Q11 **Lucy Powell:** On that numeracy point, is there an argument here—and I know you probably all agree—that needs to be made much more strongly



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about functional post-16 adult, and even pre-16, numeracy skills such as understanding compound interest, statistics, multiplication and all those sorts of things, compared to the GCSE, which is now about difficult surds, trigonometry and quadratic equations? That will stimulate some thoughts, I am sure.

Baroness Wolf: I have one request of the Committee, in fact. Clearly, we need a different curriculum post-16. One of the problems is very simple, which is that Ofqual, the regulator, says that you can have only one maths GCSE. I know this sounds ridiculous but there is this great big stumbling block. That means that when adults come back into further education or into adult community education and they do want to improve their English and maths, there is huge demand for it. It is not like they do not want to, but they are faced with a single curriculum. This is one of these regulatory roadblocks that possibly only you guys can shift.

Lyn Tett: I would agree with that. It is interesting. I have been around for long enough to have started at the very first interventions that Alison was talking about. We have not concentrated on numeracy at all in the same way we have concentrated on literacy. I completely agree, it is important.

I am not disagreeing with you, Alison; I am agreeing with you in one sense. But the issue is, if we have these narrow outcome measurements, which we do at the moment in relation to FE funding, there are adverse consequences. It is important that you as a Committee are able to make recommendations about how we need to have these broader curricula and the assessment of them is not just in relation to obtaining a vocational qualification.

This applies to Alison's work on workplace learning, for example, and some of the studies I have conducted there. John has pointed this out already. If you only narrowly look at exactly those skills that that particular employer needs and you assess it by them gaining a particular kind of qualification, then you do harm in several ways. First of all, you are not respecting the knowledge that learners already have and, if you do not build on that, then the outcomes are less positive. Secondly, you are limiting them to the particular narrow skills that that particular employer might want. But in today's world, when everything is changing so quickly, we need—as Thelma was pointing out earlier—creativity and the ability to apply those particular skills in a much wider range.

Chair: John, I will go back to you briefly because we have to get on.

John Holford: In a sense, we have interestingly focused on the relationship between school and adult education, but one very important point about the relationship between school and adult education is that in every country everywhere, including this one, the better you do at school the more likely you are to take part in learning as an adult. The inequalities there are very profound. If we are going to overcome them,



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we need to put in energy consistently over time in working with the poorest communities to draw them into adult education.

Q12 Ian Mearns: Believe it or not, we were going to come on to that in the second question on the agenda today.

Before we do that, I have been listening very carefully to what you have all been saying. The thing is, having grown up in a place like Tyneside, I know loads of lads and lasses who did poorly at school and did not get a maths GCSE but can quite happily mark a dartboard or work out six cross doubles, three trebles and an accumulator on a bet. It is not any mean feat, by the way, working out a Yankee.

Is there not something we need, that is a currency within the workplace, where people who have a functioning capability with arithmetic but not with trigonometry, geometry or algebra can get some sort of qualification to state so? That would be so useful to a whole range of employers who are never going to need algebra for their workforce.

Baroness Wolf: We have tried this now several times over. It is quite a complicated thing.

Going back to this general question of whether you can give people formal certificates for things they have acquired informally, you can if you are prepared to spend a huge amount of money on it. It is unbelievably expensive to do, because it is one-to-one stuff that needs a huge superstructure. The problem is that at the end of the day, even if people finish, the thing does not have immediate recognition because people have not heard of it. On the one hand, I feel like that is something we have tried in this country several times over with huge investments.

However, on your basic point, it is crazy that you have this formal structure and you come out and it is hard to then do stuff and go back. There, we are institutionally going backwards. It is the combination of things.

It has to be much easier for people. They have to realise that their record in the workplace will always be good, but this is a world that is getting more hung up on formal qualifications. Clearly, I did not grow up in Tyneside or, if I did, I'm making a very good job of hiding it. But if I think about my family when I was young, as opposed to the people who are leaving school now, it did not matter if you got all those qualifications. Most people did just fine. These days, the qualifications are hugely more important before you start.

The main problem is that we have completely destroyed any sort of easy infrastructure of proper institutions in all towns where you can go to evening classes briefly, where you can go for a while, come out and go back. That used to exist in every town in this country. The ghosts of it are there, but it needs to be revived.

Q13 Ian Mearns: For the Committee's perspective, could you explain to the



Committee the main differences between formal and informal learning? Is Government policy providing or promoting the right balance between the two?

Baroness Wolf: Do you want me to go first?

Chair: Be as concise as possible. We have so much to get through.

Baroness Wolf: Yes, I will try to be precise. Formal is, basically, certificated. It has outcomes measured. It has something that you can pick up at the end and take and you have evidence. Informal learning is something that you do without the desire to get an object at an end. No, the balance is not right.

Lyn Tett: I would agree. In addition, we need informal education as part of a way of tempting traditional non-participants; for example, working in health-related areas or the kinds of family learning projects where parents are working with their children. They do not necessarily want and certainly do not need a qualification in relation to that.

John Holford: I would add one point to that. Strictly speaking, there are different kinds of informal learning and they divide between the informal learning you do accidentally and the informal learning you do at non-certificated courses. If you go to a training course with your company, an evening class or whatever it might be, it is a course and it is educational, but you also learn informally from your environment.

Alison was mentioning how it used to not matter what qualifications you had. A lot of that was because you would tend to spend your career in the same employer or in very similar employers who would recognise the kind of knowledge and training you had. Now we do not have that kind of stability of employment for most people.

What it also points to is that the workplace itself is an important learning environment—or should be—but it varies in quality a lot. Some workplaces are enormously rich and give enormously rich learning to people not by any deliberate intent but because of the kinds of jobs they are, the way responsibility is shared, the kinds of technical tasks that are involved and those kinds of things. In others, you are told what to do all the time, you have no autonomy, you have no ability to think and you learn very little.

We have to develop more of the first and fewer of the second, but the tendency is for more of the second to be growing and fewer of the first. We need to look at the development of the economy and the way the economy is organised as an important part of the way in which the people in society will learn.

Q14 **Chair:** Can I come on to community learning? This is something I care about very deeply. I represent a town, a new town, Harlow, where there is an adult community learning centre. The impact it has on disadvantaged people, people living alone and pensioners is



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extraordinary. They can do some GCSEs there, but many go on to do other courses, whether in photography, cooking or whatever it may be. Often, having made that first step on the ladder, they then go on to do FE. Had that adult community learning centre not been there, there is no way they would have gone to an FE college—however much I love FE—or to a university. Also, it is fairly cheap and often they get some grants towards the courses.

I was amazed when I was in the Department for Education and I asked how many there were of these around the country. They did not know. They said that it was all a local government responsibility, although they give the grants to local government. There was no strategic overview of it and no thought about what should be happening to these, whether they existed or whether they did not exist.

I would like to know from you, first, what is the value of these community learning centres? My own view is that there should be one in every town in the country and they should be funded.

Secondly, how should they be made fit for purpose for the 21st century? The adult community learning centres of 20 years ago, the way people are with the internet and so forth, are not going to be exactly the same as they are today. What should be done about this?

Lyn Tett: I guess that is a political question, but there is lots of evidence of the value of community learning and development, which I will tell you about in two seconds.

These centres used to be pervasive and now it is very much up to the local authority and, because it is not a statutory requirement to provide them, of course they go very quickly in times of austerity. One answer would be to make it a requirement that there needs to be provision of community education in every place. That would be an overall solution.

Should I talk a bit more about the evidence that we have for its efficacy? We have several sources. We have the birth cohort studies of 1958 and 1970. Many of our colleagues have been looking at those issues, in particular in relation to basic skills, to track the impact of lifelong learning on those individuals.

We have a range of outcomes in relation to that first step on the ladder and the willingness to see that you have an interest and the willingness to carry that on and see that education could be for you. If it is a choice, that choice needs to be easy. It needs to be able to be made and it needs to be around the corner in your community so that it is a familiar space that you are happy to go into because there are lots of other things going on. Those are the sorts of things.

We also know about the benefits of working in health in relation to the way that those kinds of interventions go on. Our colleagues in health have been looking at this. Let us say you want to introduce an



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intervention in health behaviour. You want people to be more active or to pursue a particular kind of diet. The best way of achieving that is to work directly with people, not for somebody to come in and tell everybody that you have to eat these kinds of foods, but to make sure that you are asking people what they think they can do.

One of the groups that I have studied was living in an area of difficulty. People knew, I think, what a healthy diet might look like, but they had very little money. Fruit and vegetables are expensive and go off quickly. If you are trying to persuade your children to eat something they have not eaten before and you have very little, there is no way you are going to waste things where you think you cannot afford to do it. The work that was done was to have a course so that the parents and children were cooking together—things like soup, cheap to make but often difficult to persuade your children that they would like to eat—working together and making things together. That is an example to illustrate that those kinds of places are able to intervene on health, wellbeing and basic skills.

Also, in relation to working with children in schools, there is plenty of evidence that if parents are engaged in working with their children, both parents and children benefit from that in schools. There is lots of evidence of its efficacy.

John Holford: I agree with everything that Lyn has said, but I would add that it is about the quality of life of the community. These adult education centres in communities are places of resort. They are places of reflection. They are places of community interaction and engagement.

One of the things we heard on the Centenary Commission was the example of South Korea, where there is a principle that there is a learning centre within 10 minutes of everybody in the country. I may have the detail wrong there, but that is the kind of—

Q15 **Chair:** Do you think it should be a statutory requirement as well?

John Holford: That is important. The system through most of the 20th century was that local authorities were encouraged to do that, they had funding to do that and they saw it as part of their civic responsibility to establish adult education centres in towns—and in villages in some cases—around the country, and they did so. A medium-sized town would probably have several. They work with schools to do that and quite often the schools would be part of that infrastructure. Schools now, quite often, find it not possible or too complicated to allow adult education into their premises. Local authorities find the running of these adult centres excessively expensive. There is that kind of running down of the infrastructure.

One of the phrases that always comes to mind here is that of—oh dear, this is the historian in me—Colonel Rainsborough in Cromwell's army, who said, "The poorest he that is in England has a right to live as the greatest he". We need to provide quality of life for people of all



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backgrounds in all communities in the country and not say that you can get it if you can buy yourself into an expensive one.

Q16 Thelma Walker: That leads me nicely into my next question about the broader benefits of adult education, thinking specifically about three areas: the economy and productivity, health and wellbeing, and social justice and democracy. Professor Wolf, would you mind opening on the economy and productivity question?

Baroness Wolf: Why don't I say a little bit about the economy? There is in fact a considerable body of research about the wider benefits to the community. Basically, education comes up trumps on anything. If you are better educated, you are likely to be healthier and all the rest of it.

The productivity thing is quite interesting because it is a way of highlighting how good intentions can go astray. Clearly, if you believe that our economy needs skills at all—and it would be hard to argue that it does not—it would seem logical to assume that if you give people more adult education and more education of various sorts, then they will get more productive.

We know from decades of trying to do this in a top-down fashion that it is not as simple as all that. If you have a programme that says, for example, "Whenever a factory closes, we will lay on all sorts of vocational courses in the local college"—this is not just us—you find that that does not work because there is no point educating people and training people and assuming that somehow the jobs will follow. It does not happen.

One of the problems with this target-led policy that we have had for a long time is that you find, yes, if you get a degree you earn more, if you get anything at what we call level 3, or skilled crafts, you definitely earn more, and if you get a good apprenticeship you definitely, definitely earn more, but just shelling out for lots of little courses does not automatically translate into productivity.

The lesson of that is that you have to put far more of the power and decision-making in the hands of the individual and that you get better skills for the economy not by asking a Government Department to organise courses for people that they are sent on but by giving them far greater ability to learn skills when they think they want to.

Q17 Thelma Walker: Would you say that that might be a privilege of the middle class?

Baroness Wolf: It is partly a function of how you fund it. In the past, you could get a lot more for free than you can today. We have put more of our money into higher education and less into things that used to be available to people at a very low rate.

Q18 Thelma Walker: Thinking about most young families and individuals today, we have the zero-hour contracts culture and people with several jobs just to make ends meet. How are they going to have that



opportunity?

Baroness Wolf: The answer is that adult education cannot cure all social ills. The answer is that it cannot transform the economy and abolish zero-hour contracts. What you can do is design adult education in such a way that somebody who—I have to say that going to college when you have a young family and both of you are working is kind of hard, but let us take people on zero-hour contracts. If we on the one hand have a system in which we have finally done something about giving people who are in those jobs access to the same social safety net as everybody else, but we have also created an adult education system that is close by, easy to access and in which people have a right to a considerable amount of free education when they want it, that means that if, like many people in the gig economy, you are highly self-aware, highly motivated and very ambitious—

Q19 **Chair:** Can I ask you about productivity very briefly? I have always gone on about productivity and outcomes, especially for higher education. But with adult education, given what I was saying before about community learning, if you go and do a course on cookery, photography, needlework or whatever it may be, it is very hard to measure that in terms of productivity, and yet you know that it will be transformative in terms of mental health, wellbeing, socialisation and so on.

Baroness Wolf: You know that people learn things, yes, but I would also argue that further down the road you are probably also getting the productivity. Productivity is, as you know, a complex thing. There is a trade-off between productivity and employment anyway. It does seem to me that we know that simply plugging people into so-called relevant courses does not seem to do anything, but we also know that people's genuine skills—and this goes back to what John was saying—are skills that actually pay. When you are in a job, if you have skills, you get paid more. It is the devil to measure. But we also know, for example, that people who do go in and out of education do better, even though you cannot say, "They did this one week and the next week they got a raise".

We should not see adult education as irrelevant to productivity. I do not think it is. We get terribly hung up on thinking that everything should be like a physiotherapy degree and then you go straight into being a physiotherapist. A lot of skill acquisition even now, even though you need the bits of paper to get to the first base, is that when you are in the job, you are good at it. It is about the fact that you see the opportunities. In that sense, it has a huge amount to do with productivity.

If you look at the nature of highly productive economies, the ones that have a lot of high productivity operations—and those are not always across the board—they will always have a very well resourced, easily accessible adult education network. Whether it is community colleges, learning circles or adult and community learning centres, it will be there. Sorry, that was a long answer.



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Q20 **Thelma Walker:** Could I ask Professor Holford about the benefits to health and wellbeing?

John Holford: Yes. There is an enormous amount of evidence there now. Lyn was referring to the cohort studies.

One of the things that happened in the late 1990s was that the Government of the day wanted evidence of exactly this sort of thing: the payoff from lifelong learning on to all sorts of good things in society in addition to work. It set up this research centre called the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre at the University of London, which did a tremendous amount of valuable work.

It showed that if you take part in community or adult education of any kind, you get all kinds of health benefits. You are more likely to stop smoking. You are more likely to be involved in cervical screening. You have a lower risk of coronary heart disease. That would particularly apply to people who had low skills and low educational levels when they came out of school. It carries on between generations. If you are involved in adult education, it is associated with good benefits for your children's education and for their health. It also has very good benefits for participation in civic life.

It is good for people's happiness. It is bizarre. Well, it is not bizarre. Anybody who has been in an adult education course can see exactly why it is good for people's happiness. Taking three to 10 courses between the ages of 33 and 42 reduced the decline in life satisfaction that typically happens over that age by 35%. You have a lot of quite detailed investigation of that.

There is a lot of evidence in terms of its effect on mental health, both courses specifically designed for people who have depression or mental health problems and more general courses. Both have a positive effect on people's mental health.

The evidence is there and is very clear. It is in research that has been funded by the Government but, if I can put it this way, largely neglected by the people who make the decisions. It is not that they do not know about it; it is that other decisions have been taken.

The other thing I would add to that is that one of the things we know about adult education is that it is helpful for people in important transitions in their lives. By transitions, I mean partly things like going from school into work and also losing your job, having a divorce, getting married, having children and those kinds of things. Adult education plays an important part in helping people through and to reposition themselves after those kinds of developments.

Q21 **Thelma Walker:** Can I ask Professor Tett about social justice and democracy?



Lyn Tett: On social justice, okay. The social justice arguments are clearly linked to participation, as we have repeatedly said. If we want to improve social justice, we need to try to equalise people's life chances. We have been presenting evidence to you about the way in which adult education does that.

Could I add one tiny point about productivity in relation to a study I was involved in, which was looking at workplace training in SMEs? The most successful workplaces utilise the understanding and knowledge of their workforce. This was particularly true in old people's homes and caring communities. If you utilise the skills that people already have and if you encourage them to reflect on those skills and to share them, then that does lead to a direct increase in productivity in these kinds of settings. I wanted to mention that in passing.

John Holford: Could I add one brief point there? We need to think of educational outcomes as linked not only to what individuals get but to what organisations get, what communities get and what groups get. They are to be measured not only at an individual but also at a societal level.

Q22 **Thelma Walker:** The Social Mobility Commission report said that adult skills investment helps people escape poverty.

John Holford: Indeed.

Lyn Tett: Yes, we have direct evidence. The OECD report from 2018 points out the issue about education. We know that education makes a difference, but educational attainment is highly persistent across generations, with low-educated parents leading to low-educated children.

Q23 **Lucy Powell:** Hearing what you were saying about bringing happiness and everything else, I was thinking that maybe MPs should have a collective adult education course when Brexit is done, because we really need some happiness around this place.

Before I come on to a broader question about participation, following on from that on social justice, we touched on it but I thought that maybe you might be able to elaborate some more in terms of the interrelation with things like the Work Programme and programmes getting people back into work and whether you think they are fit for purpose.

I am always struck as a constituency MP by individuals who come to me because they want to do something like become an HGV driver, but that course is more expensive and so the Work Programme will offer them only the forklift course that everyone can go on and is much cheaper. We seem to have a numbers game rather than a quality game. Do you want to briefly touch on that before we move on?

Baroness Wolf: Yes. I want to agree with you wholeheartedly about the amount of money that is wasted by this sort of approach. You are constantly having people go on things and we are shelling out for huge numbers of cheap courses just to fulfil the requirements, get a tick and



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make sure they can pass because you get paid the full amount only if they pass. It is one huge pointless drain of money, in my view.

At some point, I hope I am going to be able to make a pitch for lifetime allowances. That is a classic case.

Chair: We were going to do it later, but bring it up now.

Baroness Wolf: Basically, somebody who wants to be an HGV driver should of course be able to do an HGV course and, if that means that they have to have a—

Q24 **Lucy Powell:** When they are on benefits and that is their aspiration, yes.

Baroness Wolf: Yes, they are on benefits but they are also adult citizens and they should have a right to a certain amount of education. I bet that person will have had far less education out of the public purse than any other person in this room and they should have a right to it. This whole shelling-out of short, cheap courses and the view that these will get people back to work—

Q25 **Lucy Powell:** Would your allowance be bigger for someone on benefits, so, if you found yourself out of work, you would get a retraining voucher?

Baroness Wolf: Precisely. The evidence—not just in this country but in every country that does it because everybody does it—is that these courses where you are trying to get people back to work or trying to deal with a major industrial closure do not work. What works is giving people a chance to develop general skills and skills they want, like being an HGV driver, which is a brilliant career.

Q26 **Lucy Powell:** It is very well paid but they put everyone on to forklift courses because that is cheaper and it means that the company being outsourced to do it gets all the tick boxes and then they have the money.

Baroness Wolf: It is classic. The public sector will give contracts that say you must deliver so many courses and so many qualifications with this fixed budget. It is an attempt to get maximum value for money and actually you are getting minimal value for money that way.

Q27 **Lucy Powell:** Great. Sorry, I wanted to touch on that because we had not already.

I am going to take us back a bit. All the evidence we have had in writing and in the briefings we have had has shown there has been quite a major drop in participation in adult education over the last 10 years by 40% or more. What do you think are the drivers of that fall in participation? I know we have touched on some of it already. What would be one or two things that would be at the top of your list to drive participation up, seeing as we know—as you have all said so well—that the benefits of it are overwhelming? John, what are the drivers of it down, first? Why has participation dropped?



John Holford: That is a very interesting question. Clearly, there are factors like the recession. One of the things we need to say, though, is that the recession has affected the whole of Europe but, whereas most of Europe has moved up in participation in adult learning, the UK has fallen. There is something that the UK has got wrong over the decade or so since 2008 and it goes back a bit further. It goes back, fundamentally, to this destruction of infrastructure. It is not that the demand for adult education is not there. It is not that the demand side is weak; it is that the supply side is weak.

Q28 **Lucy Powell:** Is that funding?

John Holford: It is to do with funding. It is not only to do with the amount of funding, but to do with the way in which funding is organised.

For example, a lot of further education colleges now find it enormously difficult to spend their adult education budgets because the complexities of doing so are so enormous, "You can only spend it on this, that and the other but not on this and it has changed since last year," and all that kind of stuff, so it becomes very complex. What we need to do is find a way of rebuilding infrastructure so that local authorities provide adult education, so that further education colleges provide more and broader adult education, and so that universities get back into adult education. That goes back to Alison's point: it means diverting resources away from the education of already well-qualified and broadly well-off people into the less well-educated and less well-off sections of society. That calls for big shifts in the funding, not only in amounts of funding.

We are told that we have—here am I from the University of Nottingham, how can I doubt it—the best universities in the world or something like that. However, whereas 20 or 30 years ago the University of Nottingham had enormous provision of adult education, now it has virtually none and the same is true of every other university.

Professor Tett: Another problem, especially at the community level, is that most people are sustained by applying for grants—they could be from the local authority, from the big lottery or whatever—so they spend an awful lot of their time getting money in so they can provide a service, instead of providing the service. Not only is there the time of staff, who should be there at the frontline, but people come and go. Obviously, if you are not sure whether you have a job in the next six months, you are going to move on to something else.

Lucy Powell: The hand-to-mouth survival of it, yes.

Baroness Wolf: I agree really. Partly it is the level of funding and to a considerable degree it is the way the funding is sent out. It is divided into little pots that mean that it is, amazingly, true that you have fantastic FE colleges that struggle to spend the adult part of their grant because it is in all these little pots. It is hugely wasteful because, again as Lyn has said, a vast amount of the money does not actually go on frontline



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provision to learners; it goes on the administration, the collection of data and the grant applications. It is extraordinarily wasteful.

Q29 **Lucy Powell:** We have had an idea of some of the ways to deal with that and to increase participation. You have an idea about an individual learner allowance, especially targeted at those points of transition or when you are out of work and so on. What other things do you think might help us to both increase the spending and spend it better? What about devolution and some of those issues?

Baroness Wolf: I think, alas, devolution does not help. I wish it did, but judging by what is happening in London it simply adds another layer of bureaucracy and arguing about who gets what.

The simplest thing you could do would be to basically take a flamethrower to the way the whole adult and further education budget has all these pots. I do not know as much about the local authorities, so I will stick to the adult education budget going to the colleges. If you could get rid of all these silly little divisions and special programmes, and just hand them the money and also allow them, as happens in other countries, to have a certain amount of carryover between years, I think overnight you would increase by 30% the amount of money that went straight through to the classroom.

Professor Tett: I would agree with that and I would also add this entitlement to learning, which could be a sum of money given to every individual or it could be for so much time. The beauty of something that an individual holds is that they can then spend it; they do not have to go through endless bureaucracies. I know Alison has written about that.

Professor Holford: I would point back to this 1919 report. One of the things they were very strong on was the importance of the voluntary sector in adult education. We need to rebuild the voluntary sector. Austerity and so on has had a tremendously damaging effect on the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector provides a lot of adult education—informal, largely, or non-formal—and it also encourages people to come into adult education.

Q30 **Chair:** I agree with you, 100 million per cent. You say rebuild the infrastructure, rebuild the voluntary sector; I agree. What I want to try to find out is how you do that—how you rebuild the infrastructure in the colleges, the community centres and the universities, and how you rebuild the voluntary sector.

Professor Holford: I agree with Alison's point about devolving autonomy and responsibility to further education colleges, local authority adult education centres, the Workers' Educational Association and so on, and saying to them, "Here is some money, now just go off and do good things." There are people out there in the adult education sector who want to do good things in adult education and they find themselves, as



Lyn says, fighting to work out whether the good thing they want to do fits with the latest idea from—

Lucy Powell: Yes, “initiativitis”—it is our favourite thing here.

Professor Holford: We have to trust the local communities, which can be the local authorities, the further education colleges or whatever—the stakeholders. One of the things the Centenary Commission is recommending is adult learning partnerships within regions that will bring together stakeholders to discuss and set up collective ways of thinking about this.

Q31 **Thelma Walker:** You are talking about the voluntary sector, but do you not think the challenge is now that the generation of people who quit work early is going or gone? People are working longer and are having to work longer and it is those people with knowledge and skills who used to give back to the community. How do you envisage that voluntary sector working if we do not have the volunteers there?

Professor Holford: I completely agree there is an enormous set of challenges with the voluntary sector. It is not only the funding; it is also the demographics and so on. Nevertheless, the demographics of ageing are that there are going to be more and more proportionately older people. The voluntary sector is not only, and need not only be, composed of older people. It is important that we allow, and encourage, the voluntary sector also to be composed of people of all ages.

Let me give you the example of the development of learning representatives in trade unions. They have been tremendously positive in drawing people into adult education, and trade unions are voluntary organisations. There are similar things across the piece, as it were, which can play a part in that by drawing on people’s voluntary capacity.

If you are saying there are problems in the development of the economy and the way it is going—the gig economy with two, three or four jobs at the same time and all that—yes, it does make it tremendously difficult, but we have to work very hard to counter those trends as well.

Q32 **Ian Mearns:** This is a massive conundrum for all of us, because infrastructure and staffing for that infrastructure used to exist. It has largely been dismantled over the last decade and no longer exists in many places. You cannot overnight reinvent it and you cannot overnight put it back into place. Many of the people who delivered those adult education classes just are not there anymore. Although there are people who could be trained up because they have the skill sets to do so, they are not “oven ready”, as it were, to deliver the wide range of adult education curriculum that would be required.

I take your point, John, about the trade union sector. I remember a time when about 40% to 50% of the entire workforce was in trade unions; it is now about 20% of the entire workforce that is in trade unions. Therefore, the capacity even there is not as good as it would have been in the past.



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I cannot think of any way, other than what we have to do is embark on a systematic but incremental programme of building up this infrastructure again, but it cannot happen overnight.

Baroness Wolf: I think you have to make the colleges a very central part of this. They have also been tremendously weakened and one of the things we said in our review was that the Government had to stop doing this and had to put money back in.

Colleges are the one national infrastructure that we have; it is still the case that every town has one. If we do not start from there, making it much easier for them to be a centre of adult education—obviously they are not going to provide all of it as they subcontract it out to the community already—it just is not doable.

The other thing that happened in 1919, of course, was that they basically said we want the universities to put on something and all the universities then did. I personally think they all should again, but that is always likely to be a particular end of things. I think it is valuable, but most towns do not have a university, whereas everybody has a college.

Ian Mearns: Every town has a university—it is called the Open University.

Baroness Wolf: That is true, but it has been pulling back from having bricks and is more and more virtual.

Ian Mearns: I know, because the regional headquarters used to be in Gateshead for the Open University.

Baroness Wolf: I personally think that was a big mistake.

Ian Mearns: Absolutely.

Professor Tett: There are also obviously issues of professional development and the fact that it is no longer necessary for staff in FE to have professional qualifications. It was certainly a wrong move in my view. My university, Huddersfield, still does do professional development courses for adult educators. I am sure it would be delighted to expand them vastly.

Lucy Powell: A gold-standard university.

Professor Tett: I do agree that we have building infrastructures but we certainly need staff infrastructure. I also agree the FE colleges provide that base.

Q33 **Chair:** Ian, we are going to come to the National Retraining Scheme now.

Ian Mearns: How effective do you think the National Retraining Scheme will be in terms of helping adults to upskill or retrain—are we ready to go?

Baroness Wolf: You kind of know what I am going to say: do we need another specialised pot? It is one of these ideas where you think, how



could you be against it—how could you be against giving adults help with retraining? Of course, you should not be. However, let us go back to your example of this person who was on the Work Programme and cannot go on a HGV course. The trouble with having something that is specialised and specific and that goes through employers is that it is going to be another pot. It is going to have its own regulations. It will work fine if you have a large employer with a trade union that can see what is coming along the road. However, I cannot see how it can actually enable the population as a whole to access the flexible opportunities it needs. Maybe you are in the gig economy and your bit of it is just going phut. You cannot wait for some paternalist employer to say, “I can see I am going to be making you redundant in 18 months but never mind, dear, here is this special scheme”.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to say that. I think it is one of these wonderful ideas that actually, when you think about it, you think, “No, you do not want to separate it. What you want to do is to make the existing system much more open and available and properly funded for people who may be changing jobs all the time.”

Ian Mearns: I am looking for all of you to respond.

Baroness Wolf: The other two may be far more positive, but I wanted to get that in.

Lucy Powell: When you asked the question, John went, “Uh”.

Chair: We have to finish at 11.30 promptly.

Q34 **Ian Mearns:** Is there a particular problem with the National Retraining Scheme about an overemphasis of online learning as well?

Baroness Wolf: Yes.

Professor Tett: Again, in my research with people with literacy and numeracy difficulties and people who are poor—nearly everybody, of course, has a mobile phone but online learning using your mobile phone is extremely difficult.

Ian Mearns: No, it is shocking.

Professor Tett: You need a computer. People do not have computers. Whereas they used to be able to go to libraries that had computers, lots of libraries are disappearing. Technically I think it is going to be very problematic for poor people and for people with basic skills issues, which often go together. Again, it is a top-down scheme that established the technology without thinking about how the learners are going to engage in it.

While I am here, I just want to point out that for people who have to apply for benefits, filling in a form on your mobile phone is impossible—you have to find a computer.



Professor Holford: I want to report some research that we have done as part of a Horizon 2020 project called ENLIVEN, encouraging lifelong learning for something or other. We looked at the things that are necessary for people, particularly people with disadvantaged backgrounds, to get involved in education. The one thing that was really important across all countries was personalised support and continuing personalised support; not an instant, quick intervention but something that would work with them and where they could build trust. What that pointed to was the importance of face-to-face encounters. Online learning brings an enormous amount of resources and so on, but it is a resource; it is not the interaction that is fundamental to human learning—human encounters in learning and continued support.

The other point that we found—again across the piece, across the whole of Europe—was that where you have specific targets to achieve, the providers will almost inevitably go through exercises of what is called ‘parking and creaming’: parking the difficult people and dealing first of all with the people who are the most easy to deal with, who tend to be the better educated even amongst the target group.

Chair: I accept a lot of what you say. It seems to me even the name, the National Retraining Scheme, has something of the Soviet era about it. There is already a National Careers Service. I suspect it will be replicating a lot of the work the National Careers Service does and that of many other private providers the Government pay to reskill people or to make sure they are CV and employment ready. I think that is the problem—there is so much replication and duplication. Your point, Alison, about just having one pot seems to make, and all of you have agreed, incredible sense.

Q35 **Thelma Walker:** We have touched on funding for adult education. What should the balance be in your opinion between Government and employers?

Baroness Wolf: I do not think there is a figure you can put on it very easily. I could send you the references to libraries and discussions about it.

Thelma Walker: They have it in Germany.

Baroness Wolf: I think the answer is it should be both, and also there is a case for the individual making some contribution across their life.

In a sense there is a very simple theory for this—it is just hard to work out what percentage that comes out as—which is if the skills people are acquiring are going to be of benefit to the whole community, then basically the Government should pay; if they are going to be of direct benefit to the employer, the employer should pay; and if they are going to be of direct benefit to you, then even if you might not be able to pay upfront, it is reasonable that you should pay.



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Of course the problem is going from this lovely, simple-sounding formula to thinking what you should actually do. I think it is entirely reasonable, for example, that employers should—as they do, again, in many countries—make a contribution to underwriting the cost of the national apprenticeship scheme. If everybody is not obliged to pay in, in some way, then you have this problem that people will not do it because they think other people will just take the training. Employers in this country over the last 30 to 40 years have had a miserable record, by the way, of spending on training.

There is also a very strong argument for this being a fundamental Government task. It is much less bureaucratic a lot of the time if the Government just pay for things.

Q36 **Thelma Walker:** Thinking about the future, we have 1.5 million people employed in jobs that are at risk of automation in the future, so it is kind of the real face of the future.

Baroness Wolf: I think the answer is that this has to be something for which Government pay a very great deal. However, I do think it is not unreasonable that in some cases individuals should take loans as well, by the way. If we want to be able to pay in a country for a really good education system for the least privileged and for adults who are coming back, I think we have to realise this is an extremely expensive proposition and if we are going to argue strongly for putting lots more money in there from Government, as we should, then that money has to be money that is not spent somewhere else.

Q37 **Chair:** On the money thing, obviously you have talked about individual learning accounts and you all supported that concept. In terms of reskilling employees, at the moment there are research tax credits for business for research. Should there not be a skill or social justice tax credit for businesses if they genuinely reskill their employees?

Baroness Wolf: I think there should, if one can figure out a way of doing it that will not be open to massive fraud. It would be a very good idea. As you say, you have double tax credits for research. Why not have double tax credits for training? Off the top of my head I think it is a really good idea, but like so many of these things the question is whether it is actually doable without having either a massive amount of semi-fraud or a massive amount of expensive apparatus looking at it. I think it would be a really interesting thing to consider.

Chair: I have advocated this previously.

Professor Holford: It is along the same lines, but I think businesses need to begin to think of themselves more as having a societal responsibility. That calls for shifts in legislation about the role of companies and company responsibilities. When I talk to colleagues in, for example, Germany, Austria and other European countries, they cannot understand how we have a training system that is so short-sighted and where employers do not see themselves as having a responsibility to the



community in terms of training for the workforce in general, rather than for just their own interests.

Chair: I am going to move on to Lucy finally.

Q38 **Lucy Powell:** That point takes us there nicely and we have touched on some of it through the session. What would be some of your key learnings from abroad? You have touched on some already; we have heard about Sweden and other places. If we were going to go on a fact-finding trip as part of our inquiry, where should we go and what would we learn?

Professor Holford: Goodness, what a question. Let me start by saying, again, something that came out of the ENLIVEN research—this is not a solution but to point to the problem—is that we in the UK have become over the last 10 years massively less fair. There is not only less participation, but the participation has become more unfair for the poorly educated. We have done that much worse than the rest of Europe, so there is something very bad going on with the UK.

Lucy Powell: Yes, it sounds bad.

Professor Holford: Where do we go to from there? On that basis, almost any other European country. Clearly you can look at Scandinavia in particular which has a very rich record on adult education and, broadly speaking, the German-speaking countries as well.

It is important not only to look at other countries in terms of what we can do now but what we ourselves have been able to do in the past. It is only 40 or 50 years since we had an adult education system that was, if you like, world leading. We have thrown that away collectively. We have talked about the last 10 years, but that decline has actually been going on for 30-odd years. We need to rebuild.

The other thing I would add is that even if you look now, there are some remarkably good things happening despite everything. I am thinking here particularly of community education, self-organised things by the WEA and so on—under-the-radar stuff—despite the inadequacy of funding and so on. If one found more ways of enabling that to take place—one of the things our Centenary Commission is coming up with is the recommendation for community learning accounts that would provide infrastructure for that in addition to the individual learning accounts—I think that would help a great deal.

Baroness Wolf: I would send you to Canada, which may be impractical because it is rather a long way.

Lucy Powell: We probably will not go anywhere.

Baroness Wolf: You probably will not go but I would definitely send you to Canada, because it is more similar to us and therefore has—

Ian Mearns: Can we go in February, please?



Chair: Tell us why.

Baroness Wolf: I think it is interesting. I want to agree with John that we used to have an adult education system that was really fantastic. I can remember talking to people from Germany and Holland about how much better we were at second chances than they were. What is interesting about the Canadian system is that it also is basically university and colleges. They have never had a vast voluntary system and therefore, in a way, it is kind of how you build back out from that but also get out to more remote and unconnected areas. I think they do an extremely good job and there is enough variability between places.

Lucy Powell: That is a good point because we do often look to Scandinavia on all these issues—early years and so on—but the step is too big now, is it not, for us to reach.

Baroness Wolf: There are things that make it easier if you are Scandinavia actually, not just size but also you have far more homogeneous residence patterns. You do not have nearly—

Lucy Powell: Open market, yes.

Baroness Wolf: Exactly. I think that in many ways—

Lucy Powell: Canada is a better place to look.

Baroness Wolf: Yes, and plenty of places to go to find out we are not the worst, if you want to, as well.

Lucy Powell: Maybe not. Lyn, do you have any thoughts about that?

Professor Tett: I would suggest Germany in terms of the relationship between employers, the state, the trade unions and their employees. I think they offer a really excellent model of how to focus on all those participants having an almost equal voice in what happens. If you think about the importance of the way people learn from their work and can contribute to that, I think Germany certainly values the voice of the individuals as well as the trade unions and the employers.

Of course, one of the issues in our country is that so many employers are SMEs and that makes it extremely difficult for them to think about having an individual training role. In our research lots of people said things like, “Well, why should I do that? They might poach them, why should I spend my money?” We need to think about the composition of our employers.

Q39 **Ian Mearns:** Lyn, in that mix you have talked about, how would that work in communities that are sadly still blighted by long-term unemployment? I am just thinking down the coast from me in East Durham, the former mining villages.

Professor Tett: Exactly. What I was suggesting was that there is the Canada-like home model. If you wanted to look at the employer role, Germany offers that.



However, you are absolutely right and we do have these completely excluded communities.

Baroness Wolf: So do they. Germany is quite interesting in that respect because, of course, they now also have a very large number of people on very short-term insecure job contracts.

Q40 **Chair:** On your point about under the radar, I went to an East London school where a building was used for Bangladeshi parents who were very—small “c”—traditional and conservative. They would not have gone anywhere else but because they were dropping their kids there they went to a hut next door to learn English and some of them, amazingly, had gone on to further education and higher education. It was funded by the WEA. It had cost peanuts in terms of budget, but it was an absolutely dramatic transformation for those Bangladeshi women in that area.

Professor Holford: Can I come in on the very topic of the WEA? In a sense we have in this country a handful of—sorry?

Lucy Powell: I do not know what the WEA is.

Chair: You do know: Workers’ Educational Association, it is a huge organisation for upskilling and—

Ian Mearns: It is trade-union funded largely as well.

Lucy Powell: I have probably come across it but have not really known—

Professor Holford: The Workers’ Educational Association has been going for 100 and something years. We have in this country a handful of institutions that are really historically interesting but also doing good work now. Ruskin College is another one and I have been doing a good deal of work with Fircroft College in Birmingham. They do really interesting community education but their funding is fragile. We need to find ways of putting resources in their direction.

Baroness Wolf: Close to home, go to Ruskin. They will be able to tell you all the ways in which the current funding arrangements are making their life impossible.

Chair: Can I thank you enormously? We could have listened to you for three or four hours. What you have said is very much in the direction of travel of the way we are thinking as a Committee. It was brilliant, we really appreciate it. Thank you.