

Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Education for 11-16 year olds

Thursday 11 May 2023

12 pm

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Members present: Lord Johnson of Marylebone (The Chair); Lord Aberdare; Lord Baker of Dorking; Baroness Blower; Baroness Evans of Bowes Park; Baroness Garden of Frognal; Lord Knight of Weymouth; Lord Lexden; Lord Mair; Lord Storey; Lord Watson of Invergowrie.

Evidence Session No. 5

Heard in Public

Questions 46 - 49

Witnesses

I: David Gallagher, Chief Executive, NCFE; Olly Newton, Executive Director, Edge Foundation.

Examination of witnesses

David Gallagher and Olly Newton.

Q46 **The Chair:** Welcome to the committee. I remind you that there will be a transcript taken, and you will have an opportunity to correct it in due course.

I will kick off by asking whether you believe that the 11-16 curriculum and the qualifications available in that phase sufficiently prepare students for post-16 qualifications and courses, including apprenticeships. Before you answer, could you briefly introduce yourself and give a word or two about your organisation?

Olly Newton: I am executive director of the Edge Foundation. I was previously a policy adviser at the Department for Education. I worked on some policies that are very relevant to the committee's work: 14-19 diplomas and apprenticeships. I had the privilege of being a specialist adviser to the Youth Unemployment Committee, so it is nice to see some friends and colleagues from that work here.

You asked about the 11-16 curriculum and whether it is fit for preparation. Our answer would be definitely not. I have two parts to that answer. The committee covered the first part quite strongly in the last evidence session, so I will not go into a huge amount of detail. Creative and technical subjects are clearly being pushed out of the curriculum by Progress 8 and the measures that we will come on to talk about. If students do not have the opportunity to take part in those subjects across the board, we ask a great deal of them to get to 16 and be ready to go into an interview to be an apprentice, say, and to know what that is about.

The second part, which I would like to draw out as part of my evidence, is thinking about what impact the focus, or over-focus in my view, on knowledge and exams is having on the other elements of the curriculum, and the fact that rote learning, and learning a huge amount of knowledge, does not give enough time for broader essential skills such as team-working and problem-solving—all the things that employers tell us again and again in surveys that they look for across the board in any industry.

We have done research in the area recently, and I want to share a bit of that with you. I can share the full documents with the committee afterwards as well. Our joint dialogue research looked at the development of essential skills, and one skill that young people felt least confident that schools were helping them to deliver was creativity. Fewer than a fifth of the young people who we surveyed felt that schools were helping them to develop that, yet that is the skill that comes out time and again at the top of the league table of skills that employers are looking for, not just in the UK but internationally as well. At the same time, almost half of teachers felt that the recent change to the knowledge-rich curriculum, the focus on exams, and the focus on huge amounts of knowledge being part of that, was the reason why they could not fit those broader skills into the curriculum. A third of them said that the focus on rote learning had squeezed them out.

From some of our more recent research on a project called Young Lives, Young Futures, which surveyed thousands of young people, 45% of young people—almost half—disagreed that they were enjoying their time at school. Although that is a softer measure, we cannot divorce the different crises that are happening at the moment: the crisis in children's mental health, the crisis in teacher recruitment and the crisis in productivity and skills development. For me, those are three petals of the same flower.

David Gallagher: I am the chief executive of NCFE. We are an educational charity in vocational and technical learning. We certify about half a million learners every year. In the 14-16 space, we work with about 1,000 schools, and are involved with about 40,000 learners, primarily on V Certs, which are technical and vocational qualifications delivered at 14-16.

I second everything that Olly said. It is a resounding no, and for all the reasons that Olly alluded to. There are just a couple of additional elements that I hope will be useful. In our view, at all ages and stages, but particularly through the key transition points from 14-16 and post-16 from school on to employment or university, it is absolutely critical that people understand themselves as best they possibly can, and that they have a sense of self-awareness; they know their strengths, their preferences, their likes and their dislikes so as to make well-informed choices.

While it is not necessarily a core part of the curriculum, there is a complete dearth of diagnostic assessment and a complete dearth of people getting to try different things to figure out their strengths and preferences in order to inform their choices. Technical and vocational education is a fantastic opportunity for young people to do that. The teachers and institutions we work with through our provision often tell us that, for many young people, access to technical and vocational opportunities is what suddenly lights a fire and sparks people into life. It can be engaging and inspiring.

It is not necessarily just about the curriculum being precisely aligned to the labour market and a specific job, but it may well be the thing that inspires somebody to work that bit harder, to try that bit harder, and to suddenly find out what is going to switch them on to learning and future career opportunities. It is partly about the curriculum content, but it is also about the purpose of the activities that happen in and around the curriculum that help people to understand themselves better, to be more engaged and inspired, and to make better choices in learning and life more broadly, specifically in relation to their career. Other than that, Olly said it brilliantly.

Lord Baker of Dorking: I take what you just said; you think that the transitional point at 14 is absolutely critical. You think there is a key point at the ages of 13 and 14—which happens on the continent, I must say, because they go into upper from lower secondary at 13 and 14—at which students are capable enough of making their own interests known as to what they want to study. Is that the correct interpretation of what you are saying?

David Gallagher: No, not necessarily. What I am saying is that it could open eyes. It could open up possibilities and opportunities, rather than a very rigid belief that, "There is one route for me, and it is the academic route". I am not necessarily saying that young people at that age would typically know precisely, "It's this job, it's this career, and therefore it's this path of learning".

I am suggesting that, over time, if we increasingly focus on helping learners at all ages and stages to have stronger self-awareness, they will make more informed choices and they will be more discerning purchasers in whatever decision at whatever transition point. The pace of change in the labour market means that, at 13 or 14, there is a very strong chance

that any given occupation will have been disrupted very significantly through that pace of change, so how could it be a truly informed choice?

To Olly's point—as an employer, we see this a lot—when young people come out of education at all ages and stages, there is quite often limited self-awareness in terms of the questions: “Who am I? What do I like? Where am I strong? How do I impact on those around me?” For me, it is all about building self-awareness, self-efficacy and agency, and making better choices. In that age group, it is about opening up possibilities.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Did you agree with the proposal that Mr Tomlinson, a former inspector of schools, made to the last Labour Government to have a 14-18 phase of education?

David Gallagher: There are elements that are interesting. For argument's sake, if having a 14-18 phase would see the removal or reduction of high-stakes exams at 16, that could be a positive benefit. Some aspects of high-stakes assessment at 16 are not necessary and not conducive to learners' success. I also believe that, at that stage—Olly and I were speaking about this before we came in—the brain is developing and changing faster than ever, so forcing decisions at 16 may not be the right thing to do, whereas at 17 and 18, with more experience, being better informed and the brain having developed further, better decisions may be made. I certainly think there are aspects of those recommendations that are useful in how we look at that phase of learning, but not necessarily to adopt everything that was suggested.

Olly Newton: May I add something? It is a really important point. A real trick that we miss in the English system is thinking that encouraging people to take technical education before 16 somehow locks them into those careers. Building on David's point, at that age we should be giving young people a broad opportunity to explore different fields, explore themselves and find their passion. If they do that at that age, it might lead to all kinds of different things. It does not necessarily pin them down to that career.

To give one positive example, we have done some work with Cowes Enterprise College on the Isle of Wight, which developed a maritime futures curriculum. It teaches all its lessons through the lens of careers in maritime but, when you speak to the head, she says very clearly, “We're not trying to create 1,500 boatbuilders”. Those young people will go into a wide range of different careers but, by connecting their lessons to real life—through the lens of maritime in that case, given the geography of the school—teachers show how that work is relevant and how lessons in academic subjects connect to real life, and they are inspiring young people. If we encourage people to do technical subjects early, it does not necessarily mean that they have to go down that route. They can sample it and can change their route afterwards. They can get the broader technical and transferable skills that they will need anywhere.

On the Tomlinson point, the more people I talk to, the more I feel that Tomlinson and diplomas was the biggest missed opportunity of the last

30 years of education. They were not perfect, but as David says, there were elements of them that have never been matched, in particular the way that the diploma development partnerships brought radical co-operation between schools, colleges and employers. They blended academic and technical in a way that we are moving in the opposite direction from, in my opinion, or in the wrong direction on two levels by making young people have a binary choice between either being fully academic or fully technical.

Q47 Lord Aberdare: I find it rather astonishing that, at a time when there seems to be growing recognition of the need for more technical and creative skills, partly to meet employer needs and partly to create greater parity between academic and technical skills, our whole curriculum, assessment and accountability processes seem to be running counter to that whole aim. What are the barriers to more students taking technical awards at ages 14 to 16, and, specifically, how might they be overcome? How could we move forward in this area?

Olly Newton: It is definitely an area that we are very passionate about. You heard quite a lot from the witnesses earlier this morning about the challenges with the accountability system. I think it has to start there. I do not want to go over old ground with the committee but, if we are to tackle them, Progress 8 and EBacc have to change. Until they do, we will never make a shift in those numbers.

As you know, numbers of entries in design and technology and the creative subjects—all of which not only inspire young people but power industries that the UK is famous for—have gone through the floor in recent years, which makes no sense for young people's well-being or for the economy, depending on which lens you look at it through. The knock-on impact is teacher shortages. We have teacher shortages across the board, but particularly in those subjects because they have not been valued. It is a real challenge to keep that up.

An additional challenge for design and technology, which I am sure Tony talked very eloquently about earlier, is the equipment element. Lord Baker will know this well from university technical colleges. It is very difficult to set up an engineering department instantly. You have some sunk costs that are very different from a history or a geography department. That is one of the big challenges, for sure. It links to inspection as well, which is based on that framework.

There are some glimmers of hope that we can build on. One that has existed in the system for a while is the extended project qualification at A-level and, in this committee's remit, the higher project qualification, which is the GCSE equivalent. It is a different way of teaching. It encourages the sorts of skills that excellent schools encourage—team-working and problem-solving—and leads to a project driven by the student that develops their broader skills, and would be an impressive thing to show an employer. At the moment, it is done by a very small number, and it is something that David and I and a few other organisations are working to try to expand. It seems to me that that is a

bridgehead in the existing system that is already counted, and that we can encourage more people to do.

It is important to learn from the past. We have talked about diplomas, but there is also the excellent young apprenticeship programme as was, which is an opportunity at key stage 4 for young people to sample a different career. It is also important to look across borders. I am thinking particularly of colleagues across Scotland. We do a lot of work across the UK. I definitely commend the foundation apprenticeships programme in Scotland to the committee, and we can provide more information on that. That is for slightly older young people, but the message is absolutely transferable. It is the size of a single A-level or Scottish higher and allows young people to move on to university but, importantly, if a young person moves into a modern apprenticeship, it gives them up to a nine-month accelerated start. It is a truly no-wrong-door approach where young people are developing a skill, they are able to blend academic and technical, and then they can take forward either the more academic university route or the practical route and get a head start in their career.

There is a real opportunity in the Gatsby benchmarks for careers guidance, which the committee might want to come back to. The Gatsby benchmarks have taken us a good step forward, although we are probably all clear that there is a long way still to go. For me, the real opportunity is benchmark 4—I am not expecting all the noble Lords to have memorised them—which is the one about careers and the curriculum. There is an opportunity if we can put boosters behind it and make sure that every lesson we teach in school has a connection to the real world, whether through an employer being in the classroom with the teacher sharing how it connects to their world, a project brief from a business local to the school or video content. Whatever we do, just taking a moment to connect the lesson to real life tells young people about careers and inspires them.

How often have we or our children put up a hand in class and said, “When am I ever going to need to use this?” If we can pre-empt that question by saying, “Actually, here is an employer who says that they need that skill”, how much more attentive, engaged and excited about the lesson would the young people be?

David Gallagher: Typically, technical and vocational education is more costly to deliver because of the infrastructure that is required—it is not always true in every subject, but often it is the case—and the teachers who are required to deliver it, yet we are one of the few OECD countries that spends less on our technical and vocational education than we do on our general education, so there is a gap. One of the barriers is that we do not have the investment required to do it well at scale.

My second point is about the policy and the system; I believe the coherence of the system has an impact on the choices of young people and parents. I do not believe that we have a skills system. We have a number of programmes that live alongside each other in something that feels quite incoherent. By that, I mean it is not crystal clear whom a T-

level is for and where it will work and where it might not work. How do T-levels fit with apprenticeships? What feeds into a T-level? Is a T-level primarily for university or for work, or is it nuanced? Those questions still do not seem to be precisely nailed down.

I might have a 13 or 14 year-old thinking about the choice at 14-16, but I do not know where that leads with any great degree of certainty. The incoherence in the system is a huge barrier to young people and their parents and carers. They are pushing at the system and there is demand. We find that where vocational and technical works at 14-16, it works well. There are some fantastic stories and some fantastic statistics, but we have not found the way to scale it up, in part because of that incoherence.

We have an acute problem at the moment regarding the ability of teachers in the FE system to deliver some of the occupational specialisms that we are looking to implement through T-levels. That problem would be even greater if we were to look at secondary. Olly has part of the answer to that. It is how we leverage colleges, schools and employers in such a way that their collective resources can deliver more to overcome some of the barriers.

Lord Aberdare: Are there specific ways in which employers can contribute particularly to the first of those issues—the need for equipment and facilities?

David Gallagher: Yes, absolutely. We see it particularly in FE colleges. Employers often gift equipment to colleges. That is where partnerships have been invested in, and employers can see how the programmes work for them. However, the system has, I suggest, become less coherent in recent years, not more coherent. We just need to look at the reduction in employers' overall investment in the development of their workforce. It has reduced dramatically post reform of apprenticeships. That is not necessarily causation, but there is certainly correlation. We have to re-energise and remotivate employers so that the state and employers can truly come together to invest in the system that is required. However, at the moment, we have a skills system that is being led by education, not a skills system that is being led by employers, in my humble opinion.

Olly Newton: On the employers' side, David is absolutely right on the equipment front. Employers, in our experience, absolutely grab with both hands practical opportunities to get involved. Often, because of the system and because people do not have a lot of time, there is a good-will conversation between an employer and a school, but it does not quite lead anywhere. Where we have created programmes that are tangible and have a clear ask, they work really well.

To give one example, our programme of teacher externships gives schoolteachers the opportunity to work in a business for two days up to a week and then to bring that experience back to the classroom. It is not rocket science. It is something that has been done since the 1970s through STEM ambassadors and other things, but it builds on the

opportunity to bring the curriculum to life. Some of the best partnerships we have had are the more unusual ones, such as sending an English teacher to an engineering business and getting them to think about how you explain technical concepts in a clear way, and then using that to re-engage their students and bring that back to the classroom.

The point about links with FE colleges is good. As I said earlier, one thing that was stood out in the 14-19 diplomas was the partnerships between schools and colleges, but we have lost those because we pushed for a more market-based system. Colleges are able to teach from 14. It is a very niche thing to do now, but why? Why cannot young people who want more technical education have more of a partnership with a college from 14, go and use its equipment, get independence and build on that?

A final point on institutions is that there is a really interesting lesson we can learn from independent schools. Many of the good design and technology departments are in independent schools. People pay large amounts of money for this education, but it does not look like the kind of education that the Government are pushing the state sector towards. It is broad and balanced. Many of those schools are developing their own courses and leaving GCSEs behind. We are working with a group of them at the moment. We can share more information on that with the committee. Many of them are really keen to work with state schools. I have nothing negative to say about that. They are keen to promote that work. It is interesting that they are using their independence and status as an opportunity to do something that looks very different from Progress 8 and EBacc.

David Gallagher: There is lots of consideration of the apprenticeship levy at the moment. Should we reform it? Should we change it? Should we make it more flexible? This may be a more radical idea, but one of the flexibilities could be to allow employers to free their people's time to deliver CPD in schools and colleges so that teachers get the latest practice in particular subjects, particular occupations and particular technical skill sets. It could be for a relatively modest amount of funding. We could free employers' time to be able to do that. Small tweaks in the system that are a bit more radical could shift the dial.

Q48 Lord Watson of Invergowrie: That last point is very interesting and one that we should pursue. I want to ask a question about key stage 3. I should put my cards on the table: I have a son who is in year 7 at a school in London at the moment, so he is in this; he is doing the 12 compulsory subjects at key stage 3. Technical and practical learning is often, I feel, diluted in key stage 3. It could be decreased perhaps to two years rather than three. Certainly, part of the third year often seems to be diluted. Are you aware of that as a growing problem and, if so, how do you think we might tackle it and try to turn it round to make sure that GCSE decisions are not made until the end of key stage 3?

Olly Newton: It is a really good point. Key stage 3 should be a golden time in young people's lives and education to experience breadth and to

get excited about the whole range of things they could do. Sadly, as you say, it is becoming ever more just a different part of the treadmill.

Let me start with some positives. There are some great examples of schools that are doing something different in that space that I think we can learn from. I recently visited Rivers Academy, which is part of Aspirations Academies Trust. It has been taking a much more interdisciplinary approach to key stage 3—not full time but in some lessons—and setting projects that cut across different academic subjects and get young people involved in finding practical solutions. A simple one that I saw them in the midst of—and one that any school can do—was working with a local restaurant to redesign its children’s menu.

There is a clear business objective because, if you are a restaurant, you want something that is going to work for your local population. The students were getting involved with understanding what the ingredients would cost and how they might cook them. They were working with the local chef in the restaurant and working with the restaurant’s designer to design the menu. They could take their grandparents or carers there afterwards to show them how they were involved in it and share that real sense of pride. Behind the scenes, they were getting all the elements of the national curriculum subjects. They understood budgeting, pricing and the percentage of profit, and they understood the nutrients for biology—I will not go on. You can understand. You can jump off from that to anything.

Similarly, in another of the school chains that we work with—XP in Doncaster near where I live—teachers take a real-life topic, a real-life question, which is challenging the people of Doncaster and they get the students to work on that, wholly through cross-cutting expeditions. A recent one that we worked on with them was called, “Should I stay or should I go?” It is about migration to Doncaster—a particularly hot topic in a town that voted for Brexit. The students spent time working with migrant families, understanding their stories and therefore understanding recent modern history. Then, as their key product from that, they put together a film that told those stories and acted as a love letter to migrants from the people of Doncaster. The film was shown in the local cinema to those families and to the students’ families, and the loveliest thing was talking to some of their parents afterwards and them saying, “My mind’s been changed by this film that my own child made”.

I give those examples by way of saying that it is possible. There is more flex in key stage 3 than in other areas. It takes brave leadership and a brave head teacher to use it, but when you use it you see the results almost instantly in the breadth of skills that the young people develop and how their eyes light up. I absolutely think that key stage 3 should be sacrosanct; the third year needs to be part of it, rather than just another GCSE preparation year. There are ways to do that in the existing system and we should encourage them more.

David Gallagher: There is not a huge amount I can add to what Olly said, other than to highlight one particular word. He said it takes “brave”

leadership. I am not sure that we should always need to take brave leadership; the bravery comes from fear of the consequences if anything is deemed to be a failure, because it does not quite fit the standard recipe that is safer. In some areas of our education, I do not think that there is a choice just to remain safe, because we have to keep progressing. We are falling behind in productivity. NEET levels are through the roof. There are all sorts of challenges that we face. If we stay safe, we will not best serve our young people.

As Olly says, all we have to do is look at the recent questions about Ofsted and concerns about regimes that instil fear. For me, that goes back to measures of success and accountability, although not in any precise way. They are the fundamental reasons why we are seeing some of the dilution that you described.

Lord Watson of Invergowrie: Ofsted should give cover to the point you have made there because it has been quite public in stating that key stage 3 should be completed, and I hope we can build on that. Thank you.

Lord Baker of Dorking: If you believe that at key stage 3, from the age of 11, all children in schools should be taught, say, computing, which only 10% are at the moment; design, which is virtually none; or engineering, also virtually none, students, if they take them on, will want to go beyond 14. They will not want suddenly to switch off at 14. They will want to go to a separate exam in those subjects at 16, which is not allowed by Progress 8. If you do this, Progress 8 has to go out of the window, does it not? Am I right in thinking that?

Olly Newton: I think so. As you know from my previous answer, I think Progress 8 has had its day, so that would be a good thing. You are absolutely right that that is the logical conclusion. The challenge between key stage 3 and key stage 4 is that, if you do something different and really good with key stage 3, young people in the current system have to get their heads down and stop doing it at key stage 4.

On a school visit last week, we talked to some students in key stage 3 about the way that they were being taught through projects. They were enthusiastic and were able to talk about them articulately. We said to them, "Obviously, next year, you'll have to stop doing this because that's the way things work". There was a look of shock on their faces: "We can't do our project lessons any more?" I did not want to break the news to them, but I said, "The answer is no. Nick Gibb says, 'No, you can't do these'. You need to get your head down and do GCSEs and get ready for your exams".

The one thing that gives them the most excitement and most hope in the week will be cut out because it cannot be put into the curriculum. That is the one small downside. We should definitely do something with key stage 3 but we should, as Lord Baker says, let that flow through into key stage 4 and key stage 5.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Before I asked Mr Newton a question, I should have declared an interest. I was formerly the chairman of Edge Foundation, the think tank that he now serves and behind which he is the driving force.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

- Q49 **Lord Storey:** My question is on assessment. GCSEs are largely exam-based assessments. Technical awards have managed to maintain non-exam assessments. If the Department for Education contacts you and says, "We would like to employ you to design an assessment for our 11-16 curriculum. You can be as radical as you like", what would be the hallmarks of a successful assessment that would be attractive to parents, to politicians, to society generally and, of course, most importantly, to young people themselves?

Olly Newton: I have one small point to start with. We have done a lot of work around the philosophy of vocational education and, without taking us down that rabbit hole, there is an important academic question about whether technical and vocational education should stand on its own two feet or try to emulate academic education in order to be better. I firmly think that it should have its own identity but, in recent years it has been pushed towards being more like academic education in order to be rigorous. We see things like the written assessments in T-levels and the end-point assessments in apprenticeships as a way of making it look as though you are doing something similar to academic education. I think that is the wrong way to go. Good technical education stands on its own merits, and we should not be afraid to assess it in a way that fits that.

Your question about how I would wave my magic wand is very exciting. First, we have to move to a multimodal system. Young people have a variety of different talents. We should be valuing the head, the heart and the hand—knowledge, behaviours and skills. That is the first thing that I would do. Let us move away from just written exams. They have a place; we should not get rid of all of them but, as well as written exams that test knowledge and recall, we should have oral exams, group work that is assessed, practical projects and real pieces such as the film I mentioned, which would be part of a young person's portfolio.

The second thing is to think about how that accumulates. The easier answer, or the key answer, would be for young people to have some kind of learner profile at the end of their education. It would show not just their exam results but a much more rounded picture of the young person's work, maybe not just in school but also in work outside school—for example, if they are a young carer, if they have been working towards badges in the scout movement or if they have been doing sports. All of that should be in the profile because we are rounded human beings. We have a version of that through the Rethinking Assessment movement that we helped to found. It is not perfect yet, but it is an example that we can use to develop. Employers love how it shows not just young people's academic achievements but their skills, creativity, communication and broader development.

At the risk of going on, those would be the two key changes I would make: a multimodal system, which then leads to an end-point profile that showcases the whole person rather than just their exam results.

David Gallagher: I second everything that Olly said. I will put this really simply: if you want to assess how good a cook somebody is, would you want a side of A4 from them that tells you how good a cook they are, or would you want to taste their cooking? If you want to assess how good a sportsperson someone is, would it be through a written exam? Playing the piano is a great example. If you teach people to play the piano, when do the exams happen? Are they at a set age? Absolutely not. They are when that person is ready, skilled, proficient, competent and ready to go.

There are practical elements. Of course, there are some written aspects to exams in all sorts of different settings, but the shift away from practical real-world assessment to written exams in vocational and technical education is a terrible direction for us to head in. We have mistaken that as parity of esteem because it has been assessed in exactly the same way, and it is not the same thing.

Somebody said to me very recently that different forms of assessment are not necessarily less demanding; they are just demanding of people in different ways. We know that to be true from technically robust academic research; it is not just my opinion. I was the perfect example of somebody who could sit an exam at a moment's notice and do well, but when it came to coursework I never even submitted it. I never got there; I was terrible. Lots of people are the other way round. To create a system that works, we have to truly think about personalisation of assessment, not just teaching and learning, so that we create the conditions that are most conducive to a person's success at every age and stage while absolutely making sure that assessments are rigorous, valid and reliable, and that there is trust in the system. That is hard to do because different types of assessment are trusted in different ways. We must harness technology better than we do now.

A perfect, recent example of that was when a training provider we work with said to me, very simply: "David, your functional skills assessments are boring and not suitable for our learners. We have recreated your assessment as a physical escape room, and we think it is a valid way of assessing English and maths". We had a look at it, and we agree. However, currently, the regulatory regime certainly does not encourage that level of creativity. It is a question of harnessing technology in different ways and providing a setting that is conducive to that person's success, however their brain works, however they think and however they learn.

It is also about finding ways not just for technology to work more effectively but to use the rich insight that comes from assessments to better understand what is working. Too much of our assessment system simply conveys a pass or a fail—an A or a B. We never ask why or what that means for the individual in terms of their strengths, where they need to improve, where the cohort, the whole system, could improve, and

what works and what does not work. We have a rich vein of insight there that we have not tapped into to inform the whole of education.

Olly Newton: A question that David and I ask a lot is: who are you assessing for? In the current exam system, it is too often to put the school into a league table rather than to help the young person do better. Take language learning, for example. When I was at school, I sat a GCSE exam so that my school could get ranked. I started learning Dutch recently on Duolingo—I do not know if any of your Lordships have used that free app. I choose to take tests every day, written and oral, because they show me what I do not know and let me learn it. If the assessment is for the right reasons—for formative reasons and for developing the young person more—it has a much more valid purpose for me than to say whether their teachers are doing well in a league table.

I have one point on language. David mentioned the word “rigorous”. The word “rigorous” has become synonymous with more written exams, and that could not be more wrong. When I was in the US recently, I saw an example of a high school that had moved from having just written exams to having the young people give at the end of high school a graduation presentation which was part of their assessment. As part of that presentation, they brought artefacts of learning—things that they had learnt—and had to show what skills they got from them and how they had used those skills in a different area of their life in order to pass that assessment.

One young woman talked about how she had learnt how to develop a really good argument in English literature. That is as far as our assessment system would get, but then she showed how she had distilled those skills and understood them, not just when she was working on the set text but in order to build a cogent, coherent argument. Then she had gone back into her community and worked with a charity that supported young Latina women such as her to help them to build their skills, to push back against authority, to write back to the council if their family was getting evicted and tell them no. That was what got her the green light.

The best bit of that trip was hearing how the school said that just changing that one bit of assessment at the end had had positive effects all the way down the school, all through the curriculum and all through the teaching. Teachers knew, when they were getting young people to think about their work and develop their work, that they were pointing not just to a written exam at the end but to making sure that a young person had the confidence and the material to go into that passage presentation and succeed. It changed everything in a positive light.

Lord Storey: You have both got the contract, but you did not deal with the issue of parents and politicians. Let us remember how we got here. It was often employers saying, “We take these young people on, and they can’t spell and they can’t do number work”. You get parents saying, “We want a proper education for our kids”, and they remember when they had to sit exams. You have to change minds and hearts as well in this, which

will be quite a difficult thing to do, because politicians often react to what parents and society think they want. Thank you.

Baroness Blower: I would not for a second want to put words into your mouth, but I have a sense that the jury is out on GCSEs. Given that I started teaching in 1973, I have a horrible sense that everything that happened after the first five years—or maybe even 10 years—that I was teaching has been going in entirely the wrong direction, and it gives me the sense of a wasted life. I am very heartened by the kinds of things that you are talking about. It seems to me that a multimodal focus and age, not stage, in terms of assessing what young people can do is really important. Therefore, do you agree that having a high-stakes test at 16 is the wrong thing to be doing, because everything points towards that and you forget about all the opportunities that you could have had?

I spent much of my teaching career in the ILEA, and we had a record of achievement, which functioned well. It could have been better. Everything can always be better—"much better if", as we ask teachers to say now. It seems to me that that is quite a winning position for both parents and politicians, because you can actually say that what the education system delivers is being able to show what young people can do in the round, as opposed to a focus on particular points. Do you agree?

Olly Newton: Yes. That is absolutely spot on, Baroness Blower. The idea of a record of achievement has been around for a while. The advent of technology recently has taken it to another level. To be able to take a picture of a young person's artwork with a smartphone and add that straight to their profile brings a new level to it. In many areas of education, England is lagging behind. There are great examples such as the Mastery Transcript Consortium in America and several of the provinces that we are working with in Australia that have moved their system entirely to that method of working.

Your point about what employers want is really strong. It is clear that big employers—big consultancy companies and legal firms—do not trust the exam results that are coming out of the system one bit. They run very expensive assessment systems of their own devising that they have paid millions of pounds to psychologists to develop, in order to hire the right people, and they are often not the people who have the best exam results; they are the people those very expensively developed tests spotted something in, and who could have been developed and supported through more multimodal assessment early on. It is interesting to see that they do not have the confidence to say, "Just send us your GCSE results and we'll hire you", because those results do not act as the labour market signal that they once did.

Lord Baker of Dorking: May I ask a question on timing? There can be no possible change in the curriculum before the election, which is 18 months away. It is undoubtedly the collective view of all that Progress 8 and EBacc should go because, in all the evidence we have received so far, no one has defended Progress 8 or EBacc. Will not the new Secretary of

State have to say almost immediately, “We will abolish Progress 8”? You cannot abolish GCSEs like that. There has to be an alternative system to GCSEs; there is no question about it, but you can change the curriculum very quickly. Michael Gove, when he introduced Progress 8 and EBacc, did it overnight. I do not think that he even got Cabinet approval for it. There was no debate or vote on it at all in either House; he simply imposed it. The Secretary of State has powers to do that, as I know from my own experience.

I encourage you to think in those terms. You have a report saying that there should be a review of the national curriculum. That means another two years after the next election, with no change for three and a half or four years, when there is evident need for change. Do you subscribe to that sort of view, or do you think it is quite wrong?

Olly Newton: For me, there should probably be a twin-track approach. There are some things that, as you rightly say, in our ideal world would be changed on day one, such as getting rid of Progress 8 and EBacc. Some other things need longer to embed. There is a big question at the moment about what the point at 18 should be, as you have alluded to several times. I know it is slightly outside the remit. Should we have some form of baccalaureate or some form of broader certification at 18 that would underpin the learner profile and do away with the need for exams at 16? I would say yes, but I do not know exactly what that should look like yet.

We might, on day one, want to signal that that is the 10-year vision, and then set out gradually the steps towards it. We must remember as well that, when we talk to the teaching workforce, they are absolutely exhausted; if we say on day one that we are going to switch to a baccalaureate in September, we will have an even bigger teacher recruitment crisis than we have currently. I would say go hard on some things and gentle on others, but set a long-term goal and have a stepped way to get there that does not scare the horses in the very stretched teaching workforce.

David Gallagher: Olly has touched on something that is crucially important, which is a long-term, possibly 10-year, plan so that, for some elements of what we are discussing today, we have a sense of where it ends up—the maturity model—and, at that point, we work back to now and what can be achieved in the very short term. In simple terms, on Progress 8, can we create some space on day one to do some of the things that we have described as we are considering the baccalaureate and changes of curriculum? A long-term planning piece that spans the political cycles is, we think, absolutely crucial.

Lord Lexden: Do you share the view of your predecessors that the only sensible attitude towards the Department for Education is one of despair? Do you share what you heard in the first session?

Olly Newton: I used to work for the Department for Education.

Lord Lexden: I know.

Olly Newton: Every civil servant I meet from the Department for Education is dedicated and wants to do the right thing. On a human level, everyone is trying to do the right thing. There are systemic barriers that stop that happening. You will know from my answers that I do not agree with the current Schools Minister's view of the world. One of the most challenging things about it, however, is that it hangs together as a coherent philosophy—the idea that if we just teach young people the key subjects that we did in the 1970s in the way that we taught in the 19th century everything will be okay. I do not agree with any of it, but it hangs together.

One of the biggest challenges, and the scary thing, is that you have to tackle the whole thing at once. That is really tough, because the Department for Education is organised, as I well know, into silos: you need your team to deliver more apprenticeships this year or a better geography curriculum. It will need a big strategic rethink, and that, for me, is the challenge. I do not despair at all of the people, but I feel that there will need to be a big change once we are ready to take this step.

I would love to see those civil servants allowed some time out on the front line, talking to schools and colleges, and I would also love to give them a bit of a history lesson—we have done a lot of work on learning from the past—so that they understand what has come before: things like the 14-19 diplomas, which have fallen out of the collective memory of the department but are absolutely essential to understand if we are to go forward.

David Gallagher: The questions today are right at the front here between a skills system and an education system. As I mentioned earlier, there is incoherence in the skills system and it is about meeting an ideology in the education system. At a later date I can explain what I mean by this, but in my view we have ended up with a skills system being led by education, and it is becoming more education-like. Our skills system needs to be flexible, agile, responsive and future-facing as to where the labour market and the economy is going.

Our education system will take a lot longer to get there than our skills system could. The department, to be fair to it, has a tough mandate. Is it right for the department to be taking forward the skills agenda? We have done things differently previously. If we want it to be at the heart of boosting productivity and prosperity for UK plc, maybe there is a different way to think about it.

The Chair: Thank you for your fascinating contributions and for your time this morning. We are very grateful.