



Liaison Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Committee proposals 2021—special inquiry

Monday 7 December 2020

2.30 pm

Members present: Lord McFall of Alcluith (The Chair); Lord Bradley; Lord Davies of Oldham; Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town; Earl Howe; Lord Judge; Lord Lang of Monkton; Lord Low of Dalston; Lord Smith of Hindhead; Lord Tyler; Baroness Walmsley.

Philippa Tudor, Clerk of Committees, House of Lords, was in attendance.

Evidence Session No. 1

Virtual Proceeding

Witness on Youth Unemployment

[I](#): Lord Baker of Dorking.

Q1 **The Chair:** Welcome, Lord Baker. Welcome to this session.

Lord Baker of Dorking: The House of Lords rarely debates education, because there is no legislation. The last serious debate was when student fees were introduced and Roy Jenkins and I got some debates going. Since then, there has not been a serious debate about education for several years. That is a pity, because the House of Lords has a huge wealth of experience in education. There are six former Secretaries of State for Education, four Tory and two Labour. There are three former Ministers of Education: Lord Patten, Lord Adonis and Lord Knight. There are some Peers who have been teachers, such as Lord Storey on the Liberal Benches, and there is any number who are trustees and governors of schools and educational bodies. This will give an opportunity to actively debate education.

You asked me about the relationship with the Select Committee of the House of Commons. I speak to Robert Halfon at least once, and sometimes twice, a week. We are very close. We exchange notes and sometimes we do Zooms together for other people. He is concentrating on exam procedure, and his work will in no way contradict ours; ours will complement his.

You also asked whether other departments should be concerned. Most certainly they will be concerned. The business department will be concerned, because we will want to take evidence from bodies like the CBI, the Chambers of Commerce and the small businesses associations. There is a total dysfunction in our education system between what the schools produce and what industry and commerce need. The Department for Education, ever since 1870, has never thought that one of its jobs is to train people for what industry and commerce want, and we are now suffering because there is rising youth unemployment. It depends how you measure it, but the Government at least recognise that youth unemployment at the moment is 14.6%. Another estimate puts it at 17.1%. A study by the Resolution Foundation think tank of 6,000 students over the last three months put it at 20%.

No Minister has spoken about youth unemployment in any speech in education, business or anywhere in the Government literally for years. It is one of those things that you do not talk very much about, but youth unemployment at around 15% or 16% is three times the figure for normal unemployment, at about 4.1%. We will explore the reasons why we have that high level of youth unemployment. I have my own very clear view on it, which is that shows the dysfunction in the department.

Ever since Michael Gove introduced his curriculum in 2010—it is called Progress 8 and comprises eight academic subjects, which, word for word, are the same as the ones in the curriculum in 1904—there has been no attempt by the Department for Education to introduce technical education. All schools are judged on Progress 8, and heads do not want any other subjects.

So, since 2010, a technical subject, design and technology, has been almost squeezed out of the curriculum. They have also squeezed out a lot of the cultural subjects, such as music, dance and drama, which have dropped by 25%; design and technology has dropped by 70%. We are the only country in the world that has no technical education for young people below 16. It really is amazing, so one should not be surprised at the level of youth unemployment. Lots of our youngsters are leaving school at 18—that is basically the school leaving age now; hardly anyone leaves at 16—without any employability skills. By employability skills, I mean having worked in teams, made things with your hands, designed sophisticated things on computers.

We will explore all these things very well over the next year. We will certainly come up with conclusions within the year which I think will be quite profound. We will be dealing with the Treasury and the business department, and I think we will produce a very original, interesting report. Quite frankly, we should not tolerate youth unemployment of 17% or 20%, with over 100,000 youngsters permanently unemployed in the fifth richest country in the world. It is simply a disgrace and we will try to set that right. I am very glad that we have the support of a bishop in our corner, because the Church of England has enormous experience in education.

Thank you very much. I would like to know when we will know. I would like to get started on this as soon as possible. When are we likely to be told about it?

The Chair: The staff will have a conversation with you after this and will fill you in. We have all that information for you. Thank you for your submission, which was excellent, and the flavour of what you will do. Best of luck with that, Lord Baker, as you move along with your inquiry.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Thank you very much. I would like to get started well before Christmas, please.

The Chair: You have a good conversation with the staff and they will come back to me. Thank you very much.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Thank you very much indeed.