HOUSE OF LORDS

Social Mobility Policy Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Think tanks and commentators

Thursday 15 May 2025

10.05 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Manningham-Buller (The Chair); Baroness Blower; Lord Evans of Rainow; Baroness Garden of Frognal; Lord Hampton; Lord Harlech; Baroness Hussein-Ece; Lord Johnson of Marylebone; The Bishop of Lincoln; Baroness Ramsey of Wall Heath; Lord Ravensdale; Lord Watts; Lord Young of Cookham.

Evidence Session No. 8 Heard in Public Questions 89 - 104

Witnesses

I: Lord Willetts, President, Resolution Foundation; Justine Greening, Founder and Chair, The Purpose Coalition; Nik Miller, Co-founder and CEO, Bridge Group.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Lord Willetts, Justine Greening and Nik Miller.

Q89 **The Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming to give evidence to this year-long investigation into social mobility, which this committee is doing. We are very grateful for your time. We have a number of questions that we want to put to you. We have already taken quite a lot of very interesting evidence, but we particularly want to hear your views.

We have a number of questions, and I am going to start off with the first one, which is really about the definition of social mobility. This is our standard first question, and we sometimes get quite different answers. I would like to ask the panel what you would consider, in trying to define it, to be the most significant issues and concepts.

Justine Greening: There are two definitions of social mobility: absolute and relative. I am sure that the committee has been talked through those, so that is, in a sense, the technical answer. What is behind it is a concept of equality of opportunity, in that your start in life and your circumstances, whether the place where you are born or your family circumstances, should not affect your ability to fulfil your potential and progress.

The Chair: Would either of you want to amend or add to that?

Nik Miller: I would be delighted to build on Justine's comments. It is worth noting that, at the Bridge Group, we focus mainly on workforce diversity. For us, social mobility is about the connection between circumstances of birth and adult outcomes, but important in social mobility is also the measurement of access to opportunities along the way, so that we can understand what is underneath that main metric.

When it comes to workforce data collection, we, with many other colleagues, including the Civil Service, have advocated for parental occupation at age 14 as the key metric of socioeconomic background. If it is of interest, I would be delighted to talk in more detail about why that metric over others.

Lord Willetts: I would summarise it as your opportunities in life not being determined by your parents' circumstances. If you interpret it, there is quite an interesting debate about whether you are really measuring what is happening to people's incomes relative to their parents, or looking more widely at things such as their social class and type of employment. Because the economists have control over the data, we have tended to end up with very economic income-type measures of social mobility. I also agree with Justine's point.

The other thing is how that performance compares with what is happening across society as a whole. If you have a big surge in the number of white-collar jobs, it can look as if you are doing better on

social mobility, even if, apart from what is happening in the structure of society, you are doing no better than any previous generation.

Justine Greening: That is such an important point. When we have seen periods of apparent improved social mobility, they have largely been correlated to a structural change in the economy—for example, the creation of white-collar jobs. They have not reflected a fundamental improvement in equality of opportunity between people from different circumstances, and that is why this is a societal issue.

There is another concept that I wanted to mention to the committee. I spent four years in international development. I see Britain's weak social mobility and inequality of opportunity as a development challenge for the UK. Therefore, if that is your lens that you put on it, what you realise is that it is multifaceted and complex in nature and, therefore, needs to be broken down.

I was involved with the UN in designing the sustainable development goals. Certainly, with my work, we have come up with a goals framework that we call the purpose goals, but, frankly, could be called the social mobility goals. It has broken the challenge down into 15 key goals that need to all be achieved in order to drive equality of opportunity. It is about breaking down the problem to then understand that it has some constituent parts that are distinct but related as part of the broader solution.

Q90 **Lord Johnson of Marylebone:** Should Governments be solving equality of opportunity first before focusing on social mobility, or do you see them as inseparable one from another?

Justine Greening: There is a danger of getting into semantics. You might call it social mobility. As you know, when we were together at the Department for Education, we used the phrase "levelling up". This new Government talk about breaking down barriers. In a sense, some of those vocabulary definitions are less important to me than what I think is here in Parliament, which is a collective understanding and buy-in to the fact that where you start in life should not determine your ability to get on in life.

The challenge is moving away from the semantics, if I am honest, and on to the solutions. We know the problems. We do a lot of measurement that is somewhat flawed at times. The question is how we can grasp this complex, multifaceted challenge and, in a non-piecemeal but strategic way, really start to shift it for the long term. That is why we need to look at this as a development challenge, but for Britain.

Lord Watts: How does success look? Is it about individuals or about the masses being able to do that? There is a difference between the philosophy around both of those. What is the aim of success, in your view?

Justine Greening: Again, going back to my time at the DfE, we used this phrase: "Talent is spread evenly. Opportunity is not". If talent is spread evenly, and I genuinely believe that it is, you would start to see it flow through very commonly into a wide variety of opportunities. For me, this has never been an agenda about gifted and talented people being able to get to the top. Of course they should, wherever they start in life. It is for everyone. It is about saying, "Whoever you are"— indeed, whatever your terms of success are, because it is not career for everyone—"there should not be barriers stopping you from making the most of your potential".

Nik Miller: Maybe just to connect those two questions as well, all the research indicates that equality of opportunity is the bedrock of more equal rates of social mobility. As you will know, the related topic there is pay inequality, which both reinforces and reflects inequality of opportunity. Our pay inequality here is wider than in many of our peer countries.

There are two topics that are rarely discussed in this area, which relate to your questions. One is that the narrative often tilts towards saving the few—I use that slightly provocative language on purpose—and the idea, to echo some of Justine's points, of getting a few people from very disadvantaged backgrounds into an elite law firm, for example. That is noble, but it will not create the change that we want, so this issue of more systemic change has to be the focus.

The other area that is woefully underdiscussed is downward mobility. These conversations almost always gravitate towards upward mobility, and refuse to discuss immobility at the top and opportunity hoarding.

Justine Greening: It is interesting, and I am going to build on Nik's point just to say that, while there is that challenge, it is tempered by a sense of free market on talent. More people getting more opportunity will create more opportunities. It lifts everybody's boat. In a sense, it is not a zero-sum game.

Lord Willetts: I just want to add one metric that is very vivid, which is the changing social composition of particular activities or professions. That is where you can see where things are getting worse. Examples include acting and, if I may say so, journalism. There has been a massive shift in the social composition of journalism. You can track these changes, and what they often tell you is that the routes in have narrowed or depend on a period when you are willing to operate with very low incomes. People who come from family backgrounds where there are savings and patient parental support get through those barriers much more easily than those who come from family backgrounds with no financial support for them.

The Chair: In your answers so far, Lord Willetts, you referred to some of the data being too much on the economics of this, and others mentioned data. Our next question is about what data is available and how that is or

is not helpful to us.

Q91 **Lord Ravensdale:** Last week, the committee had a really excellent visit to Blackpool. One of the things that we heard about there was the way that they are better integrating local data. They have a data platform that allows them to much better tune their interventions when it comes to social mobility. What does the research of your organisations tell us about the advantages and disadvantages of the data currently available on social mobility in the UK? How could that be improved?

Lord Willetts: I was involved in the battles to get proper access to some of the data, and especially the longitudinal educational outcomes, or LEO, data, which is now the classic dataset, because it links quite good educational data with HMRC data, although there are imperfections. It is sometimes overinterpreted, and the HMRC data is not perfect, but that is a good basic dataset.

We at the Resolution Foundation have been warning increasingly, sadly, of the unreliability of a lot of labour market data, including the Labour Force Survey. If we get on to NEETs later on, that is an area where, although we can discern some trends, the data is, sadly, not reliable now.

As to where one could get extra sources of data, there are two suggestions. First, the Student Loans Company data is incredibly useful granular data that is very rarely used and has connections that you do not get from HMRC data, not least because you need to know about parental incomes to calculate things such as entitlement to maintenance loans. As it has been collected for 20 years, properly putting SLC data into the new National Data Library would be a real advance.

Secondly, one of my frustrations—and I am afraid that this comes from my particular focus on HE—is that there is an endless discussion about academic versus vocational. There is this picture in which you go to university to do English literature or philosophy and, if you want to do engineering, you go somewhere else. There is very poor data on the number of students doing vocational courses, and you can define that in various ways. You can define it as a licence to practise: people are doing a university course because you need to have that qualification to do it. If you ask what proportion of university students are doing a licence to practise vocational course in order to practise a vocation, you will not be able to find an answer to that at the moment, which is very frustrating.

You can define "vocational" in other senses. There was a very interesting exercise a while back looking at university courses that lead to a particular concentration of occupations—"People who do these courses all tend to end up doing the following two or three types of job"—which might tell you that, even without a legal requirement, it is a vocational course. This is all potentially useful information, including for prospective students, and is, again, very hard to obtain. That would be a second area where the data could really be improved.

Justine Greening: When I was Education Secretary, I was awash with data on everything to do with education, or most things. When you look at the outcomes of education—people in employment—it is like a black box. We are literally spending £60 billion a year on primary and secondary schools alone, developing talent, and looking at how it progresses into further and higher education. When it gets to employment, where the large point of education is literally to enable people to connect with opportunities, do we measure any of those outcomes? No.

The biggest thing that we could do on data, which would really start to get a grip on what is happening with opportunity in Britain and measuring equality of opportunity, would be to get employers to measure socioeconomic background. We need something collective with employers, a Hampton-Alexander-style approach, to get them to track socioeconomic background.

I would be delighted to lead any of that effort, but it is essential, because what gets measured gets done. Until we do that, we will have occasional pieces of research that tell us what is happening, but we will not have that ongoing sense of progress or otherwise as to people's ability to get in and get on in careers, which is absolutely crucial.

Nik Miller: Just to build on that, this is largely where the Bridge Group's research has focused. To echo your points, more employers need to commit to collecting this data, and more and more are taking it seriously. We have a strong regulator in the legal sector, which has mandated the collection and sharing of socioeconomic background data for just over a decade now, so that is a good example of a regulatory requirement.

Where we have had that data from employers, it is often cross-sector. We have 45 financial services firms now submitting this data annually, and similarly in real estate, in the law and in accountancy. What that data is starting to show us is that socioeconomic background has, on average, a stronger effect on progression and on pay compared with some protected characteristics, including ethnicity and gender. That is an important finding from a large dataset. That is not to suggest that we should play diversity Top Trumps and suggest that one characteristic—

The Chair: That is an unfortunate expression, if I may say so.

Nik Miller: The pun is absolutely unintended. Those relationships really matter, but, if we do not focus on socioeconomic background, as colleagues are advocating here, we miss such an important part of the jigsaw, let alone all those important relationships that we are discovering in the data between socioeconomic background, and gender and ethnicity.

Justine Greening: We miss the race to the top as well, because there are some sectors that are brilliant engines of social mobility, whether it is

hospitality or construction. What we are missing is understanding where to look for solutions.

The Chair: We may be being too ambitious, but the committee hopes to be able to recommend at least a number of practical and not-too-expensive solutions, if we can.

Q92 **Baroness Blower:** On the question of collecting socioeconomic data, we heard from the Co-op that it does this routinely across all of its functions, and about how useful it has been. We have also heard that there are different definitions of social mobility. Is there an intervention to be made by Government to say, "These are the parameters in which you need to be collecting this data"? Otherwise, we are back in the position where we are not necessarily comparing the same dataset across different areas of activity.

Justine Greening: That is why it is very akin to gender. When I was Minister for Women and Equalities, we had the Davies commission, which became Hampton-Alexander. It was a voluntary approach to encourage companies to collect the same data, and then we shifted to the gender pay gap regulations. There was Cabinet Office work done in 2017 that, basically, looked at which were the best questions. They trialled them with employers, and saw which ones employees were most likely to answer.

The good news for us is that that work has been done. We have four key questions, as Nik says. There is a dominant key question, if you like, if you are just asking one as an employer, which is parental occupation at age 14. The benefit of that question is that it is OECD-compatible; in other words, we could start to measure international results against ours.

The other three questions are around free school meals, the type of school that you went to, and, if you went to university, whether you were the first in family to go. None of these is perfect. In policy, we often argue about imperfections, but, directionally, they tell us where we are headed. For now, they are good enough, and those are the ones that we should be asking companies to answer.

The Chair: Lord Willetts, do you want to add anything?

Lord Willetts: I just have an observation about how you sometimes get some very useful natural experiments. Universities are obliged to collect a lot of this data on access, and it really enriches the debate. When degree apprenticeships were introduced, we had, for the first time, people who had been recruited as apprentices then going to university. For a given subject and a given level, you could compare the university intake and the apprenticeship intake. For a given level and a given subject, the apprentices were more white, less disabled, and more male.

For the first time, this university-type monitoring of the behaviour of a group of employers revealed what we had feared: that there were

significant barriers in employment recruitment feeding through into apprenticeships.

Q93 **Lord Evans of Rainow:** What role can and do schools play in promoting social mobility? What can be done to help schools be more effective in promoting social mobility?

Justine Greening: Schools are crucial. I talked about how, in my work, we had broken social mobility down into 15 key areas. The first several goals relate to education, whether it is early years, school years, access to advice, or pathways after 16, and all of those things matter. As I am sure other evidence sessions have brought out, there is too much focus on knowledge and skills, knowledge in particular. We have to recognise that that is necessary, but not sufficient.

For a world where employers want resilience, project management and teamwork, we know all about this, but the reality is that it is not formally built into the curriculum. As Education Secretary, I looked at three key areas. One was knowledge and skills. The second was careers and understanding where you wanted to go. The third was great experiences that really develop us. We have no strategy on that final third around personal development, yet it is crucial. We teach academic pathways. We have increasingly vocational pathways, but we do not have entrepreneurship pathways. In a sense, we have a partial education system.

Lord Evans of Rainow: Why is that?

Justine Greening: It is a rear-view mirror on the kind of Britain that most people have grown up in. It is a rear-view mirror on a pre-Google age that prized a brain that could remember a lot of things, when what we need, in a knowledge economy in the 21st century, is creative thinking. At the very time that universities are shutting humanities and arts courses, other countries are realising, "This is where we want more lateral thinking developed".

Lord Evans of Rainow: Creative thinking and problem solving.

Justine Greening: Problem solving, resilience, teamwork and an entrepreneurial mindset are all absolutely crucial.

Lord Willetts: Of course, schools can be absolutely fantastic, but I would add just two notes of caution. First of all, when you are assessing their performance, there are enormous incentives for schools, in lots of subtle ways, to recruit the people who are going to do best. It makes an enormous difference, the pool that you have in your classroom. When I was an MP, I observed how some schools that I got to know in my constituency were clearly playing that game in lots of subtle ways, and others would complain that they get the ones that another school would not accept.

My second point is already a theme in some of the evidence that the committee has had. Our biggest failure in schooling is what happens to the kids who just fail their GCSEs first time round. Look at the waste from what we do in the English system and at the disaster of resits as currently required. There is very powerful social science research. If you just miss out on your GCSEs at the age of 16, it is probably the biggest single fork in the road now as you go through the English education and training system.

Lord Evans of Rainow: We went to Blackpool last week and had evidence of the three high schools in Blackpool all doing what you just suggested there. As an MP, I also recall similar ways that high schools used to compete with one another.

Nik Miller: Just to highlight three very practical things in the schools sector, the first builds on Lord Willetts's comments. School league tables disincentivise the very behaviours and policies that we would advocate for greater equality. They have a similar effect to university league tables, in fact.

Secondly, do not underestimate the way in which private tutoring perpetuates inequalities in the school system. Some 46% of young people here in London have a private tutor at age 16. It drops to about 10% in those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The National Tutoring Programme helped equalise some of that inequality, but, of course, it stopped just two months ago.

Thirdly, to build on the earlier points, good careers advice and guidance is least available to those who need it most. That is a matter of investment and of unfortunate neglect. I would draw your attention to our former chair Sir John Holman's work on the Gatsby benchmarks, which feel more relevant than they ever have, around good careers advice and guidance.

The Chair: I am afraid that I am ignorant of Gatsby. Is that out of Lord Sainsbury's Gatsby Foundation?

Nik Miller: That is correct. Sir John Holman was commissioned to produce a set of benchmarks for effective careers advice and guidance.

The Chair: We will have a look at them.

Q94 **Lord Harlech:** Since the pandemic, we have seen a rise in absenteeism and an increase in people being home educated. Justine, you were talking about all the characteristics that employers want in terms of how to work in a team and share social skills. Even if someone is getting a good home education, which is not a given, how are they going to be able to develop those social skills that are necessary for the workplace? What are your thoughts on the rise in home education, basically?

Justine Greening: It is really concerning, and some of it, anecdotally, may relate back to the benefits system.

Lord Harlech: We did hear that.

Justine Greening: In a sense, it would be absolutely shocking if children were literally not going to school in order that parents could continue to receive benefits.

I would make two points. First, the education system needs much more ambition. Even I grew tired of targets of halving a gap when what we need to do is to have a strategy to close the gap fully. The second thing for the committee to think about is that the problem with social mobility is that we do not have an architecture or framework at the overall level to think about it.

For the issue that we are talking about here, it is like macro and microeconomics. We need to understand the micro level of how it works on an individual in their journey, to the points that David just talked about. We know, from international development, that those transition points are the points of highest risk. There is a huge amount of research out there more broadly that we can draw on to start to build up a more evidence-based understanding of that individual journey that people go on and how that might differ for different cohorts of people. We just have to get serious about digging into the layers of this and mastering the complexity. Otherwise, we will stay in a world of piecemeal solutions that do not hang together as a strategy. We can do this.

The Chair: What you are saying is of a lot of interest and hands are going up: Lord Watts first, and then Lady Blower.

Q95 **Lord Watts:** You had a negative comment about the effect of private tutors on social mobility. My own view is that it is a very effective way to get kids to catch up. Is there something to be learned in the state sector about providing extra tutors to do one-to-one at the early age in the same way as parents who are more affluent do?

Justine Greening: Yes, absolutely. If we are going to close gaps, we have to have a much more tailored education system that probably has a core offer for every child, but then is supplemented by almost an additional offer, whether it is academic or mentoring and advice. I was lucky enough to have great parents who were really supportive. Not every child has. There are probably other areas where I might have needed support. I did not have a clue about careers.

All of this is absolutely doable. It is just about being smart, having a proper strategy, and understanding that different children will have different gaps in their development, for different reasons. Until and unless we are able to succeed in this real world that we are all growing up in, we will continue to not have the results that we want.

The key thing to realise for all of us—and I had these regular discussions and arguments with Treasury—is that children grow up. We are taking a decision about what kind of adults they are going to become. That is unavoidable. It is lives off track, as we now can see, that cost the

Exchequer and Treasury far more than lives that are on track. It was such a shame to see Kevan Collins's education recovery plan not fully funded. The sooner we can get to grips with frontloading and keeping lives on track, the sooner we will start to see some long-term, virtuous-circle outcomes of that for everyone.

Nik Miller: Specifically to your question on private tutoring, there is not a problem with private tutoring per se. It is the unequal access to it. I endorse what was implied in your question, which is that it should be more widely accessible. Do not forget that the biggest predictor of whether someone goes to university is not their socioeconomic background or their ethnicity, but the grades that they get at school, so we must not dodge the question of unequal attainment.

Again, I would draw the committee's attention to the National Tutoring Programme, which ceased to be in March 2025, despite a very positive evaluation. I encourage you to look at that.

Q96 **Baroness Blower:** One of the issues that I am sure we are all alive to is the fact that the special educational needs and disabilities aspect of education is woefully underfunded. While I believe that children should be at school, and I am not pro-home education in a general sense at all, there clearly are parents who take their children out of the school system, because it is not responding to what they present with at school. Do you agree that that is an issue? When we are talking about having a system that works for everyone, I assume that you are also including everyone who has special educational needs and disabilities.

Could I just take you back to 16-plus assessment? There is now a wide discourse about whether GCSE is sensible for everyone to do. In particular, there is an issue about English and maths, because that is such a big gatekeeper. Would it be fair to say that you have a view that there could be a different way of assessing young people at 16 in English and maths, if we need to? I am not talking, as someone did in Blackpool last week, about having an easier system, but a more appropriate system that may be more relevant for what their future trajectory is.

Justine Greening: We are getting deep into curriculum. Just on your SEND question, you are absolutely right. It is very hard to make sure that the system works for all children who are SEND, but, interestingly, in relation to children with a neuro-disability, for example, employers are really starting to understand the value of those people as employees and to see the positive offer that they can bring. There is a route through on that, but, of course, there is no doubt that investment is crucial.

On 16-plus, it is time for us to recognise that we do need a benchmark, but it has to be relevant. The reality is that our maths GCSE is a maths science GCSE, which is crucial if you want to go on and do science, but, for someone like me, I wanted to go on and do business, ended up becoming an accountant, and have not used trigonometry since. The

question is almost, "What is relevant?" That is what we need to measure and check that children are coming out of school having learned.

The Chair: Lord Willetts, you have written about thinking that it is a bad thing that you have to choose what to do at that stage and that the thing narrows. Do you want to comment on that?

Lord Willetts: Yes. The three A-level model and early specialisation at the age of 16 is very bad news. I would much rather we had a broader curriculum up to the age of 18, expecting to do more than three A-levels. I hold universities partly responsible for this, in that, if they are asked, the more that people know in the specific subject that they apply to do at university in advance, the better. If you ask a physicist to design a physics A-level, you end up with 18-year-olds who know a hell of a lot of physics, but have no sense of the history of Great Britain, which is a tragedy. That is important.

On the resit problem, I checked the figure, and one in six of students who fail their GCSE maths first time round and then resit get through. I completely agree with Justine that the assumptions that we have about the sort of maths that you do are out of date.

I have become an increasing T-level sceptic, given the amount of resource that has gone into T-levels in, I think, an experiment that is less and less likely to succeed. It has had a series of distorting effects, including the enormous amount of money that is paid to employers to deliver the 45 days of work experience, which has pretty much killed all other forms of work experience that teenagers could have. There is quite a radical agenda here about broadening the curriculum, accepting that T-levels are not quite delivering what was hoped for, and looking at the GCSE resit problem.

Q97 **The Bishop of Lincoln:** Justine, in the second of your 15 principles, about the school experience, you identified somewhere that Lincolnshire has some of the worst school experience in the country. I was interested in school culture and the interplay of ethos and excellence. What influence does culture have in developing children's resilience and access to social mobility?

Justine Greening: It is hugely important. Every school looks at this, and all teachers work on it. The challenge is that it is not formally part of the system. The measurement and accountability system is focused on one quite narrow lens of what children come out of school having accomplished. It is missing tracking another big bit that we know is crucial for their success, so we are blind on that.

Worse still, we do not even have a strategy in the first place for what we want our children to have got to in terms of problem solving and resilience, et cetera, or how we might go about checking whether they have done that and then putting in place a system to make sure that it is happening, or working out how schools can do it effectively. Teachers

face a really tough choice. Where do they focus? Inevitably, they will focus on grades, results, and all of that.

Lord Evans of Rainow: On Lord Willetts's point about 16, you have to take options at age 13, do you not?

Lord Willetts: You are absolutely right. Indeed, it is even earlier. If you need to have done the individual subject GCSEs to go on and do the A-level, you are absolutely right. In reality, it is often 14.

The Chair: So far in this evidence session, we have spread across quite a lot of issues already, which has been invaluable. The next question is about universities, which you have already begun to talk about, but we are not asking you to repeat what you have said already.

Q98 **Baroness Garden of Frognal:** How effective are universities in promoting social mobility? I was in university in the 1960s, when the grammar schools were a massive source of social mobility. You had bright, poor kids going to grammar schools, which propelled them to university. That route has now disappeared. What can be done to enhance the social mobility prospects of young graduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds who may come out of university with a degree that is not entirely relevant to anything at all? David, I so enhance what you say about T-levels. I was against them from the start.

Lord Willetts: There is still a battle to fight on access and getting in. Although progress is being made, when we have 20% of kids from the lowest-income backgrounds and 60% from the most-advantaged backgrounds getting in, we have not made enough progress.

One reason why I am very wary of these proposals to control student numbers and things like that is that you either have to tell one of those places where 60% are going, "I am terribly sorry, but you have to have fewer of these well-educated, middle-class kids" in order to create space, or, going right back to the Robbins philosophy, say that, if 60% are going in the affluent areas, we should aim for the other areas to reach 60% as well. There is an access agenda.

My thinking developed as the evidence came in. When I started off as a Minister, the focus was, "Would kids be put off from applying by the fear that they were going to have to pay up front?" That would have been a disastrous misunderstanding. We had excellent programmes in which we recruited recent graduates to go to schools and colleges just to explain in practical terms the realities of the system. It was a very useful scheme that could be revived.

Although we were doing a bit better on access, what shocked me was the later evidence that, for a given level of degree attainment, when you went out into the labour market, the disadvantaged kids did less well in getting good jobs than the advantaged kids who were coming in at exactly the same degree level. In a way, university was this wonderful stage where, just for once, the disadvantaged kids, if anything,

outperformed, but, when they went out into the labour market, they were at a disadvantage again.

It was increasingly made clear that access money is not just for universities to help the students arriving. It can also be used legitimately to help current students out into the jobs market. I have to say that, now with the 25% real cut in university resource per student, expecting universities to do all this is getting harder and harder. Just like other stages of education, you need to be resourced in order to do those types of programmes.

Justine Greening: I thoroughly agree with what David said. I am probably quite a good example. I got bad careers advice on my A-levels. I was brilliant at economics, but terrible at physics. If I was trying to get into Southampton University today to do economics, I probably would not make it, not because I am bad at economics—I got a first-class honours degree—but because I was rubbish at physics.

Part of the challenge with assessing universities is that we have really focused on the access piece. There is a lot more work to be done on that. The big challenge now is how to make sure that talent flows into opportunities. Again, I have my own experience. I was the first in my family to go to university. I thought that I was there to do the best possible degree that I could. That is why I worked so hard. I had a great time as well. I developed a lot, and we often miss that side of university. We think that it is just about a degree. For me, it was transformational in terms of my personal development, my sense of opportunities and my ability to meet people who I had not met before.

That connecting up to opportunity was, no doubt, worse, and it was quite a nasty surprise for me when I suddenly realised that getting a first-class honours degree did not mean that I would always get the job compared to somebody who had just got a 2.1. That had literally not occurred to me, believe it or not, aged 20 or 21.

The risk is that we are assessing those universities that have that cohort of a lot of children, such as me, from working-class families, and we are saying, "They're not doing very well. They're not getting them into jobs", when that is a reflector of employers not being open to the wider talent pool and not being sophisticated enough at their access and participation plans, which is what I now spend my time doing with employers, rather than the universities themselves. Many universities are doing a brilliant job of skilling up and having that talent ready to go. It is now the employer piece of the talent pipeline that we need to make sure is lined up and as open as universities have largely become.

There is a huge focus on Oxbridge, but, behind that, the Russell group universities could do a lot more, in my experience, to develop working-class talent. There is another cohort of non-Russell group universities that are brilliant at doing this, but there are what I might call some coasting universities that do not do enough.

Nik Miller: Through the access and participation plans, as has been mentioned, universities are making good progress on access. Those gaps that were referenced earlier between those from a lower and a higher socioeconomic background around continuity rates, completion rates and progression are widening, based on the latest data, which should be deeply concerning.

I agree with the earlier point that that gap in progression is largely a construct of the behaviours, preferences and approaches of employers, and we will come on to that later.

The Chair: We are coming on to an employer question later.

Nik Miller: There is one revenue source for UK universities that has increased massively year on year over the last 20 years, and that is philanthropy. Philanthropy to UK universities reached a record-breaking £1.5 billion last year. It goes, of course, disproportionately to those institutions that are least diverse. We need to think carefully about how those philanthropic funds are spent, given that lots of donors are interested in widening access and outcomes, and, on the other hand, to be wary of the risk that the net effect of philanthropy is making the wealthy institutions wealthier. I would focus your attention on that topic around philanthropy too.

The Chair: That is a new one for us.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone: Justine and Nik, do you agree with Lord Willetts that reimposing student number controls would be a negative for social mobility?

Justine Greening: It would be disastrous. What we need to do is create high-quality pathways, and young people should then be able to choose. It is as simple as that.

Nik Miller: It would be deeply unfortunate. One of the strongest policy levers that we might have to pull here is increasing the number of spaces at our most elite universities.

The Chair: On that encouraging note, let us move on to Lord Hampton's question.

Q99 **Lord Hampton:** One of the things that we in this committee are really concerned about, and becoming more concerned about, is NEETs, particularly young NEETs. A lot of the evidence that we are getting is that education is not the great leveller that we think it is, in that you get out what you put in. We have talked about careers advice, the retakes being the fork in the road, the data being there, and the relevance of the curriculum. What could you recommend to us, which we could recommend, that would make a difference to the education experience of NEETs, particularly young NEETs? How would you encourage them, first of all, into the job market, but then back into it if they are out of it?

Lord Willetts: We have done some work on this at Resolution, and there are worrying trends. As I said, the Labour Force Survey data is not totally reliable, but it looks as if trends are in the wrong direction. It is particularly bad that the trends are in that direction when you allow for the fact that, first of all, there is a decline in the number of young women getting pregnant, which was one of the drivers of NEETs in the past. There is also an increase in the number of young people going on to higher education. If you have those two things happening in the background and the number of NEETs is still going up, you have a problem.

There are a range of policy options, but one thing that I would say is that I remember the policy debates in government about this. For nearly 15 years now, there has been an obligation for people up to the age of 18 to be in either education or some kind of employment also with training. It has never been clear to me how this requirement is tracked and enforced. Who is it who is supposed to know that young Jim Bloggs, age 17, is at home watching TV? Where is the bit of the system that takes some responsibility for tracking this person? Local authorities are, in theory, supposed to, but, in reality, we have passed a requirement that is currently not enforced in any constructive way.

The other issue is that, although there is a great debate about it, it does look as if there has been an increase in mental health problems among younger people. Indeed, what is also quite shocking is that, while mental health problems were historically concentrated among older people, they are now more prevalent in younger people than any other age group. That is a shocking thing for a society to go through. How do we handle mental health issues, especially for young people who have no engagement? At least universities know who they are, try to help, have obligations to help and are increasingly engaged with this. It is partly, undoubtedly, just medicalising conditions that we did not medicalise before, but that is not the whole story. Social media, in particular, has made this a lot worse, especially for women.

Justine Greening: By the time someone becomes NEET, things have gone wrong a long time earlier. Clearly, the committee is rightly looking up stream at how we stop this happening. It comes back to that micro journey that I talked about, and understanding that this is almost the sharp and most profound end of weak social mobility. There are people with lesser challenges, and they also need solutions.

One of the things that we in the Purpose Coalition are doing with our universities is getting some of the employers to do what we have called Purpose Lab, where the students are doing paid work experience and giving advice on social impact, social mobility, what they need to see companies do in order for them to be more accessible, and how they can improve their recruitment approaches.

We trialled this to see how it would work, but the students have really found it highly valuable. It has increased their confidence. They are

getting some great work experience on their CVs. They are getting a variety of experiences that are building up their portfolio of knowledge. These are often students who have a job while they are doing their degrees.

Lord Hampton: Are these university students?

Justine Greening: They are university students. It has struck me that, if I look at that micro journey, it is something that might well work for people who have low confidence and are out of the job market. These are smaller-sized experiences that can build up their confidence to think, "Yes, maybe I do have some value. I can offer things to employers". This is potentially part of moving towards being more employable and having an employability strategy.

We are just trialling it with university students at the moment, but it is also great to see employers really engaged with it and starting to think how they can do almost a more 21st-century version of work experience. Those sorts of models can work quite effectively for presenting a new way of interacting with people who have just felt completely disconnected from everything that is going on around them. They feel like their peers are moving further and further on while they are just completely stuck.

Lord Hampton: Could you see that working in schools?

Justine Greening: We should be following that kind of approach everywhere. We happen to be doing it with our universities, because it is a great way to get these WP students broadening out their CVs and not making the mistake that I made of not even thinking about a career until you get to the third year. It is also about building the link between employers and this talent pool, and helping them to understand it and see the value in it.

The Chair: This is an area on which I can speak for the committee. We have had some pretty shocking evidence on the increase in people in this pool. I suspect that one of our recommendations, without presuming, will be to offer some practical suggestions for how we can reduce the increase, or stop it being like this, if it can be done. Mr Miller, do you have anything to add to this subject, which is turning out to be quite a core theme?

Nik Miller: Yes, reassuringly so. This really steep rise in NEETs is an alarm bell for earlier interventions not having been introduced. There is a bit of retrospective work here to do, looking at the data, about what can be done much earlier upstream.

For those people currently in that situation, I would suggest a couple of things, and you may have seen evidence of this in your visit to Blackpool. One is the emergence of these co-ordinated, place-based hubs where employment organisations are coming together with education, health and housing. Blackpool is a wonderful exemplar of that.

We are also beginning to see much more deliberate and targeted summer support schemes for those students leaving school for whom it might be dropping off a cliff. Those might be two practical approaches.

The Chair: Lady Hussein-Ece is going to move us on to employers, on which we have had various points already, but as a separate question.

Q100 **Baroness Hussein-Ece:** Thank you very much. As you would expect, the committee has already heard from a number of employers who are actively involved in a wide range of initiatives aimed at improving access and progress into jobs, such as work experience and apprenticeships, particularly for those from a lower socioeconomic background.

I just wanted to ask for your assessment of how effective these initiatives might be, bearing in mind what Nik Miller said earlier—I wrote it down here—about how a systemic approach must be discussed, not just a selective few. Even in Blackpool, we met employers there who felt quite frustrated. They felt that they were doing their part, but it was not widespread or systematic. I would be very interested in hearing your views on that.

Nik Miller: My overall diagnosis is "reasonable progress, but very patchy". We have a good set of examples on which we can draw. There is a bit of symmetry here with the discussion around higher education earlier. There has been a strong focus among employers on access, particularly on junior hiring, and the hiring of graduates, which connects with our previous discussion—so, outreach work with students who might be from underrepresented groups, contextual recruitment that considers students' prior attainment in the context in which it was achieved relative to their peers, and much more transparent and clear application processes.

In our data at the Bridge Group across a range of sectors, we have evidence of the fact that access is only part of the story. There are these very unequal progression rates. For example, in financial services and in the law, employees from lower socioeconomic backgrounds progress about 25% slower compared to their peers.

The Chair: Is there any explanation of that that you have been able to detect from your research?

Nik Miller: Interestingly, we can control for performance in some sectors. One conclusion might be simply that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds do not perform as well in the workplace; therefore, it is just that they progress more slowly. That is not the case. Performance is not a factor here, apart from in our studies in the legal sector, where, among the 10 leading UK law firms, we discovered that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds progressed more slowly, were more likely to leave, but, on average, were performing better than their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. That, if the legal

sector needs it, is the business case for investing in this. It is a matter of talent, not just of equality.

I will mention three of the factors contributing to this. One is that we often find in the qualitative data—interviews with people in the workforce—that many of the attributes that help you get ahead in the workplace have little to do with job performance, and are typically much more available to those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. These include familiarity with professional norms, networks, presenteeism and self-confidence.

Senior sponsorship, so being endorsed by a senior colleague, really helps you get ahead. In our evidence, that senior sponsorship is disproportionately given to those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds as well.

We also see a great deal of career self-sorting. In the law, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, for example, steer themselves away from commercial and corporate law, because of the way that they associate it with a particular dominant culture. The same is true, for example, in the work that we have done at the BBC, where people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds steer themselves away from roles in commissioning, for example. In terms of beneficiaries of the Fast Stream programme in the Civil Service, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, despite performing as well, steer themselves away from working on policy matters. Those are some of the factors.

Lord Evans of Rainow: Can you share with us the thinking behind why people from certain backgrounds do not do commissioning at the BBC?

Nik Miller: I will give you a headline and try to summarise hundreds of interviews. It is largely because the dominant culture is heavily skewed towards white affluent men in particular. There are some aspects of different professions where those cultures are more dominant compared with others. In some of our studies, which have all been published, in commissioning, it appeared that debates about German philosophy became suddenly important at some broadcasters when you were debating what to commission to put on television. It is a flippant but important example of discussions that get you currency in the workplace but have very little to do with your competence.

Lord Hampton: My wife used to work at the BBC and was in meetings that took place in Latin. She did not study Latin, so sat there bewildered.

Baroness Hussein-Ece: That is very interesting and comprehensive. Justine, you talked about personal development and resilience not being taught further down. From what we have heard, it seems to me that there is a lack of that from people who are talented and have the ability, but are perhaps not given the confidence, personal development and resilience in order to progress in the same way. Is that fair to say?

Justine Greening: Yes, perhaps. Maybe I can speak from personal experience, having got right round the Cabinet table. It may also just be that, when you have worked that hard to get into that level of position, you do not expect to be having a meeting in Latin. There is a slight loss of patience with people who perhaps are not and have not had to be quite as serious in their career to get to where they are. If you are a high performer, you want to go and work with talented people, not less talented people who are there just because they happen to know someone who knows someone.

Rather than it being an issue of a lack of resilience, it is literally a question about why you would stay somewhere when it is full of people who are not that impressive. It is much more that. The solutions to all of this for employers come down to data and measurement. Credit is due to Tim Davie that he has put some targets for the BBC on socioeconomic background, so that it can start to track. Basically, businesses—and certainly big businesses—need the kind of access and participation plan that we have seen universities put in place. Their pipeline needs to be as wide open as the higher education system pipeline now is.

In a sense, if you think about how much companies have obsessed over sustainability plans, we now need to see that same level of focus on social mobility plans, and they need to be transparently set out. Certainly, the work of the Purpose Coalition is to work with businesses to make sure that they are open to that wide talent pool, and that it can, as Nik says, not just get in but get on. This is almost the nuts and bolts of how we are going to drive change in Britain.

There is increasingly a business case for it, because, as you go down the generations, young people increasingly want to work in companies that stand for something positive, including equality of opportunity. Going back to my first comment, who would you want to work for: a company that does not seem to prioritise talent and merit, and does not have a track record of pulling talent through, or a company that does and is really diverse and vibrant, with lots of different people and ideas? I know where I am going to work. Smart companies are getting much smarter at working out how to reach into that talent pool. I am happy to write to the committee afterwards about the Purpose Coalition work, because there are lots of examples that I could talk about.

The Chair: It is worth saying to all the panellists that, if there are things that you have heard from our questions and interests that there is further data on, or reports or recent work that you have done, we would welcome that. Lord Willetts, do you want to add anything on this question?

Lord Willetts: Yes, very briefly, because we were straying a bit into BBC bashing, which does happen all around the place, but this is an issue about the creative industries. It is absolutely a sector that expects people to start off moving from one job to another on short-term contracts, often not earning much, or on an internship. That is how they operate.

Indeed, to be fair to the creative industries, they produced a report last year—I am just trying to remember the details—which is absolutely about improving routes in and pay for younger people in that sector. It is a sectoral problem, and you can see it in the patterns of employment and early-stage incomes.

Nik Miller: I just want to echo a couple of points. One is that the BBC is one of the most, if not the most, progressive and transparent organisations that we have worked with in this space, and we should celebrate that.

The second is a brief note that these types of dynamics that we are describing are often invisible in the workplace. Based on our interviews—and I can share a bit of personal experience here—people are very good at assimilating to a dominant culture and hiding their socioeconomic background. That is exhausting, and I hope that it will become increasingly unnecessary.

Finally, there are some really interesting relationships between socioeconomic background and gender, where, in the majority of our data, we see being from a lower socioeconomic background having a stronger negative effect on a woman compared with a man. I will not labour that point, but it is an important example of the intersectionality between this characteristic and others.

Q101 **Baroness Ramsey of Wall Heath:** We have heard evidence about large regional differences on social mobility, whether coastal, rural or city—some cities—or parts of the north, the south-west and so on, with big variations. We wondered what work you and your organisations have done that shows the causes of this, and whether there are common strategic themes that you would want to share with us that could be adapted to improve access to opportunities and social mobility. I would be particularly grateful, Ms Greening, if you would refer to your reflections on the opportunity areas that you established when you were Secretary of State for Education.

Justine Greening: For the committee, opportunity areas were place-based pieces of work aimed at improving education outcomes. They were not devolution, because we did not just wash our hands and say, "Bradford, get on with an opportunity area". It was something very different to that. It was about having one team that involved local actors, led by local education leaders, with businesses, generally with local authority involvement, and with the NHS, so whoever was needed to be part of that stakeholder group. Crucially, DfE officials were also part of those teams.

They were tailored pieces of work that decluttered those schools' landscapes to ask, "Collectively, what are the priorities?" For example, the North Yorkshire opportunity area prioritised teacher recruitment. If half of your catchment area is the sea, you are going to have a problem finding enough teachers. In Bradford, there was much more of a focus on

early years, and on literacy and numeracy. They all came up with their plans that they owned at a local level, which had local buy-in and had KPIs around them, and then got on with them.

This was not rocket science, but the clarity and the sense of purpose meant that they really did start motoring towards them. In Whitehall, where it can be very difficult for departments to work together, they were very nimble at joining up with the right partners on the ground, whether it was the police or the NHS in Bradford. They ended up looking at data between opticians and eye checks for children, and literacy. They realised that a significant number of children did not have the right glasses, or did not have glasses when they needed them. Simply putting together that data and then taking action through this "Glasses for Classes" initiative saw Bradford have the biggest jumps in literacy improvements across the entire country.

The way that you do this is to have a consistent approach that is allowed to be tailored at a local level. I deliberately allowed the opportunity areas to almost let a thousand flowers bloom as a test. The way that I would analogise it is that it was a bit like a curry. It was all the same dish, so there was a consistency to it, but the spices that went into it were different for different communities, because they faced different challenges. They were tailoring them to their specific place rather than AN Other.

We should question why we ever expected a one-size-fits-all education policy to land in the same way in totally different communities. It would be intellectually highly surprising if that happened anyway. Opportunity areas really did get buy-in at local levels in a way that was very powerful. There was lots going on. We were going to join up employers a lot more. We would have done a lot more had I stayed at the DfE. There is lots that you can learn from them.

The last thing to say on them is that they were innovating, as in Bradford, and we were spreading that innovation around some really different communities, very quickly, through research schools in the opportunity areas. You could see that it was a nascent ecosystem that would work.

The Chair: We do not want to lose your helpful advice, but I am conscious that time is pressing on. Therefore, I just would like to ask whether either of the other two witnesses would like to add to Ms Greening's comments about it not being the same everywhere, which is a theme that we have heard already. I really do not want to stop you saying things that are going to be of help to us, but I am also conscious that we have said that you can go at 11.30 am. The problem is that we may manacle you to the desk to keep you afterwards.

Lord Willetts: I will make one comment then, if I may, especially because I gather that the committee has had a very important visit to Blackpool. When one thinks of cold spots and places where we need to

spread opportunities, creating a university in one of these places is a great way forward. The claim is that Blackpool was offered a university decades ago and decided that it did not wish to have one. At one point, the University of Lancaster was planned to go to Blackpool.

If Blackpool had a university today, what the committee experienced there might have been different. Places such as Coventry, Lincoln and Worcester have radically changed, in terms of both the type of jobs and local opportunities. There would be a case for another cold spot competition for places that would like to pitch to have a higher education institution. In Germany and in the US, which are two federal systems, the way in which you compete for good people is to create a university wherever you can and bring them in.

The Chair: That automatically brings us to the Bishop of Lincoln.

Q102 **The Bishop of Lincoln:** I read some of the Resolution Foundation's work saying that the outcomes for graduates who stay in their home region are not necessarily worse than those people being helicoptered, in social mobility terms, to London. Certainly in Lincolnshire, we get this drain of people moving away. The VC for Lincoln is also the chair of the local enterprise partnership. I am interested to know what you would have to say about how regional partnerships might be stronger in supporting and encouraging young people to invest in and enhance the quality of their own region, rather than disappear from it.

I have a meeting soon with the LEP, and I would be interested in some advice about what I should say about how we can invest in stronger social mobility regionally, and not just assume that it is disappearing to somewhere smarter.

The Chair: Keeping people in the area.

Lord Willetts: There is a London effect. London has this extraordinary agglomeration of very large numbers of people, including large numbers of graduates, who can all get into the centre of London and work together incredibly productively. Those are real economic effects.

At Resolution, when we did our Economy 2030 enquiry, what was shocking was that the twin second cities of Birmingham and Manchester do not really capture any kind of agglomeration effects like this. The number of people, and graduates in particular, who can get into the centre of Birmingham in particular in half an hour is shockingly low. If you compare it with European second cities, a far greater number people can get into the centre of Lyon in half an hour. Our argument was that radial transport and improving access to our twin second cities was one way forward, with the agenda that they should be more like Frankfurt, Milan or Lyon, and that we should not have this shocking gap between London and the rest.

Lord Evans of Rainow: We have had previous evidence that Manchester was 25% less productive, which may build into that. What you are saying

is that public transport is an issue in our second cities and elsewhere.

Lord Willetts: Yes. You get benefits just from having large numbers of people together. It appears that that yields a benefit. Incidentally, we know from the work of people such as Enrico Moretti that, fortunately, those benefits are then spread more widely. Non-graduates earn more as well in those places. When we try to understand why Manchester and Birmingham are so much less productive than London, they are surprisingly small travel-to-work areas for what are supposed to be serious European cities.

Nik Miller: Here is a wonderful example of the way in which university league tables disincentivise the behaviours that we would like to encourage. The University of Lincoln is heavily measured on its graduates' salaries. It is in the university's interests to encourage its graduates to move down to London. It is an unhelpful contradiction in the system.

The Bishop of Lincoln: That is perhaps why he was a bit nervous when I raised the question about social mobility in the region, because it is certainly true that the creation of the University of Lincoln massively transformed the economy of the region. Without doubt, it rescued the county and its growth 30 years ago. The question is what that contributes, though, to the ongoing resilience of the region.

Q103 **Lord Young of Cookham:** I want to ask a question about the role of central government. Two of our witnesses have held high office in central government and may be well placed to answer this. Basically, who is responsible for promoting social mobility? Earlier on, David, you mentioned the 17-year-old Fred Bloggs and asked, "Who is responsible for making sure that he's not sitting at home watching television?"

A moment ago, Justine, you mentioned the difficulty that departments had in working together. You also touched on home education and the way that the benefits system facilitated it, where it may not be the best outcome for the child.

If you look at the number of government departments that are fishing in this pond, you have the DfE in terms of early years, schools, FE and higher education. You have the Department for Work and Pensions doing benefits and jobcentres. You have the Department for Business and Trade doing the Employment Rights Bill and apprenticeships. You have the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and we have discovered that local government is often playing a key role in bringing together all the partners. Above that, you have the mayors.

Who is responsible for driving forward the agenda of promoting social mobility? Are there any barriers in the way that central government is now organised that make it more difficult to achieve a common goal?

Justine Greening: Maybe you would expect me to say this, but it is the Prime Minister who needs to do this. There is another department, which is DCMS, that looks after youth services.

I have looked at where Government fits into that goals framework. For quite a lot of it, it is an enabler. A bit like with climate change, it has to do enabling policy, for example, to enable more employers to go further and faster on driving social mobility strategies.

You might want to look at the tax system. Why should an employer that is keeping lives on track and actively working upstream in communities to be part of solutions pay the same level of tax as an employer that does none of that and, effectively, contracts out lives that are off track to the state?

There are a few areas in particular where Government is the lead, and there is no question about that. One is education. Another might be the justice system and its ability to get lives back on track. You need to bring together, for each department, a social mobility strategy, and then, at a prime ministerial level, knit those strategies together. I am afraid that it is the only route that you will get through.

I have thought about this and, if it was me, you would have a normal Cabinet, and then a social mobility cabinet to bang heads together. Otherwise, it is not going to change. Weak social mobility sits alongside climate change. These are the great challenges that we face: people and planet.

Lord Willetts: First of all, the link between the benefits system and access to training is one of the long-standing Whitehall territorial issues. The people running the benefits system think that the education people are endlessly trying to use benefits to fund education and training that they do not have the money for themselves. If you ever try to say, "Could we have a disregard where you carry on getting a higher rate of unemployment benefit, even if you are on a course?", they say, "Hang on. You are asking for us to pay for education courses. No". That is a particular and long-standing issue.

Overall, I very much agree with what Justine just said, but there is an immediate operational opportunity. This is not a personal remark about the excellent Education Secretary, but it is very bad that the chair of the opportunities Cabinet committee is the Education Secretary. In my experience, almost every Education Secretary believes that early years is the priority. If you put the Education Secretary in charge of the opportunities committee, it would conclude that you need to spend more on early years.

Who do you need to have chairing that committee? It does not need to be the Prime Minister. Who knows? Perhaps Pat McFadden is the ubiquitous figure doing it. You need to have someone who is not the Education Secretary and who asks a different question, which, sadly, I

would not trust the Education Department to answer on its own. "For a given amount of money"—half a billion pounds or £1 billion—"what do we spend it on that buys the most social mobility? Do not just turn up and assume that it is extra early years provision, please." That question, rigorously asked across Government, with Cabinet Office as lead, is a far better way of organising this committee than having the Education Secretary chairing it.

Justine Greening: I am going to make another bid for why it needs to be the Prime Minister.

The Chair: The poor man has quite a lot of other things to do.

Justine Greening: The department that we have not talked about yet is Treasury. Until Treasury is properly reformed—and it never has been—you will not get functioning investment decisions made across Government on human capital.

Lord Young of Cookham: That is quite a serious challenge.

Nik Miller: I would refer us back to the earlier part in the conversation when we were talking about the important relationship between social mobility and income inequality. The Employment Rights Bill will help with this. To address pay inequalities, pieces of policy such as setting the minimum wage sensibly, having pay transparency, regulating more carefully insecure and low-paying work, and reviewing the tax system, as was mentioned earlier, will undoubtedly have a positive effect on overall social mobility.

There is an opportunity for the Government to play a leadership role in modelling some of these practices as an employer. In the Civil Service, there is a version of departments coming together to have an overarching social mobility strategy as an employer. There have been really progressive practices in Government, not least from the Cabinet Office and the Fast Stream. The Government and the Civil Service have a chance to model good behaviours in this space as an employer as well.

Lord Young of Cookham: What all three witnesses are saying is that, within the structure of Government, a Cabinet sub-committee might be one of the things that we look to. In a sense, Justine, the Prime Minister is responsible for everything, and so it is a bit unfair just to add this.

Justine Greening: I am just making it the top priority. That is the thing.

Lord Young of Cookham: For the Prime Minister to do that, he needs to—

The Chair: I do not think that our recommendation on what the Prime Minister should do day to day is going to have—

Lord Young of Cookham: The idea of appointing a Minister, but not an Education Minister, to co-ordinate and bring some of these things

together is a very helpful suggestion.

Q104 **Lord Watts:** I have the final question, you will be pleased to know. Is there anything else that you want to draw our attention to? Can you suggest two recommendations that would help social mobility?

Before you answer that, can I just pick up on something that you said about the numbers of places in universities, and whether they should be cut, maintained or increased? This is a discussion that I have had with many middle-class people who tell me that there are too many kids going to university. Then you say to them, "Where are your kids going to?", and they always say, "University".

You talked about the BBC, where most of them are middle class and white. People will choose people like themselves. I do not think that they do it overtly, but there is a problem there, because they are the establishment.

Justine Greening: It is probably a very natural human instinct to gravitate towards people you have a lot in common with. What we know is that high-performing teams are high performing generally because they have a real multiplicity of experiences and advice. You would not have a football team just of strikers.

The Chair: In the course of your evidence, you have given us some recommendations. Lord Watts is asking you to produce a couple each of your top recommendations, which I suggest need to be practical and affordable, but based on evidence.

Lord Willetts: That narrows it down quite a bit. I would put in just one observation, because, of course, there are interventions in so many stages of people's lives. Maybe you would expect me to say this as a former Universities Minister, but, when you look at the evidence for the transformation of life opportunities for kids on free school meals who then get into higher education, it is a very powerful intervention. Those three years matter as much as the first three, and the number of kids from disadvantaged backgrounds who have that opportunity is still shockingly low.

We now have all these teenagers emerging who were clearly very badly hit by Covid. Having this cohort now arriving in higher education with levels of funding per student in higher education lower than they have been for decades is in danger of exacerbating rather than helping tackle their Covid damage. You can do it without increasing public expenditure, by pushing up fees, without students having to pay that up front.

I would have a new initiative around access to HE linked with, if anything—and this does have a cost—bringing back some means-tested maintenance grant and, as an absolute minimum, increasing the maintenance loan along with the fees, so that kids have the cash to live on while they are at university. They pay it back afterwards if they are in well-paid jobs. It is a very powerful social mobility tool.

Justine Greening: I have three, but they are quick.

The Chair: I will allow that, Ms Greening.

Justine Greening: Thank you. The first is fixing Government through Treasury reform. It all starts and ends there, in a sense. That is why the National Tutoring Programme is being cut. Evidentially, it is highly valuable. There is no reason to cut it other than a non-evidence-based decision that is too short-termist. It is absolutely crucial here that Treasury now gets reformed. I cannot overstate that enough. I speak as a chartered accountant who went into Treasury and thought, "How on earth are they managing public finances?" That is the first thing.

The second thing is to track socioeconomic background in employment. You have no idea what is going on unless you get this base data. You do not even know where to look.

The third thing is that businesses have to have a plan. They are a massive part of the solution. They are the opportunity holders. So many of them are doing lots. It is now time to create a race to the top by insisting, frankly, that businesses play that wider role. I am not suggesting doing something that is bad for business. There is a business case, and businesses are stronger and better when they know how to reach the whole talent pool. We will drive our productivity by having stronger companies that can succeed by progressing more talent.

Those three things would change things significantly for the better for the long term.

Nik Miller: I would amplify the earlier points on data in the labour market. There are regulators asking questions currently about whether they should mandate the collection of SEB data. I cannot think of any good reason why they should not, based on all the evidence that exists.

There are two areas that I referenced earlier that risk being blind spots in some of these discussions. Discussing downward mobility as well is essential. I agree to an extent that this is not a zero-sum game, but there are only so many university places at our top 10 institutions, unless, of course, we increase the number of those spaces, as we discussed earlier. The zero-sum game thought experiment is not a bad one to have, so thinking about what this means in terms of downward mobility.

I referenced the piece around philanthropy specifically in the higher education sector. The Centre for Social Justice published a report last month looking at where philanthropy more generally flows. It is very disproportionately into London, of course. If we can, for example, introduce a matched funding scheme, as that report proposed, to get more philanthropy into regions such as Lincoln, that would be a huge lever to pull.

The Chair: Can I end by saying thank you so much? We have had a

great deal of evidence already on this committee, but that was very valuable and we are really grateful for your time. Various documents and reports were mentioned, and Bruce is scribbling away here, but if you have data and reports that you have used, and we do not already have them, we would love copies of them. Thank you very much.