



Select Committee on COVID-19

Corrected oral evidence: Living online

Tuesday 9 February 2021

10.30 am

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Members present: Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho (The Chair); Lord Alderdice; Baroness Benjamin; Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen; Lord Duncan of Springbank; Lord Elder; Lord Hain; Lord Harris of Haringey; Baroness Jay of Paddington; Baroness Morgan of Cotes; Lord Pickles; Baroness Young of Hornsey.

Evidence Session No. 10

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 112 - 122

Witnesses

I: Margaret Mulholland, SEND and Inclusion Specialist; Natalie Perera, Chief Executive, Education Policy Institute; Richard Sheriff, President, Association of School and College Leaders; James Turner, Chief Executive, Sutton Trust.

Examination of witnesses

Margaret Mulholland, Natalie Perera, Richard Sheriff and James Turner.

Q112 **The Chair:** Good morning and welcome to the House of Lords Select Committee on Covid-19. We are looking at the long-term implications of this horrible pandemic, and are currently in the final stretches of an inquiry into the impact of this period of digitalisation on many aspects of our economic and social well-being. This is our last formal evidence session, with our witnesses today looking specifically at education—an enormous and important topic. When we started this inquiry in September, I do not think we had anticipated that so much would still be going on online in another lockdown, so we really appreciate having our witnesses today to help us to think about the long-term implications of this.

I remind Members that, if they have any interests, they should declare them before speaking. We have structured our questions but, if anybody would like to come in, please wave at or alert me, and I will bring in anybody who wants to speak. I also ask people to stay on mute when they are not speaking, just to make sure that we have real clarity, because we are being recorded and transcribed.

As I said, our committee is looking at the long-term implications of Covid. We are talking about the two to five-year horizon, which I appreciate is complicated, particularly as we are still in the middle of so many different challenges. I ask our witnesses to help us to think about that long-term view rather than a post-mortem or current dissection of what is happening right now.

First, I ask the witnesses to introduce themselves. We have read your helpful submissions, so just say where you come from so that we can put some names to faces. That would be immensely helpful.

Margaret Mulholland: Good morning, everybody. I have worked in a special school for many years and in mainstream secondary schools. I am currently the SEND—special educational needs and disabilities—and inclusion specialist for the Association of School and College Leaders. I also write for the *Tes* on research and have a real passion for young people who struggle to learn in our schools, whether they are in mainstream or special education settings.

The Chair: I know that that is an extremely important area and one in which many Members have detailed interests, so thank you very much for being with us.

Natalie Perera: Good morning. I am the chief executive of the Education Policy Institute.

Richard Sheriff: I am the chief executive of the Red Kite Learning Trust up in Yorkshire, responsible for 8,000 children—that frightens me some days—in both Leeds and North Yorkshire, including children from very deprived communities in Leeds. My other job is president of the

Association of School and College Leaders. It is a pleasure to be here today and speak to you.

The Chair: I cannot imagine that feeling. Having two children feels terrifying enough; 8,000 would be quite unbearable. Thank you very much for being with us.

James Turner: I am the chief executive of the Sutton Trust, which is an education and social mobility charity. We do research and policy work, and work directly with about 7,000 low-income young people every year. I am very pleased to be here.

The Chair: Thank you. I am sure that this has been a time of intense work for all of you, so we appreciate you taking time out to talk to us today. I now hand over to my colleague Baroness Young to start the questions.

Q113 **Baroness Young of Hornsey:** Welcome to all our guests today. As Martha has already said, the key issue is what we are going to do over the next two to five years and what policy recommendations we might make to government. One theme that has emerged strongly throughout our work is inequality. That has probably been more evident in education than anywhere else, except for health.

The first question is about how much we know about how well secondary school children have been able to learn during these periods when the pandemic has necessitated teaching being done digitally. I want to focus on what has varied between different groups of children, including those from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to learning-disabled children. I declare an interest here, as I have been doing some consultancy work with Learning Disability England.

Can we have a sense of where those different groups, some of which intersect with each other, are at after what has happened during the pandemic and what is likely to happen going forward?

Margaret Mulholland: It is fair to say that, for young people who we might describe as being at a disadvantage, whether because of their risks in learning—their special educational needs—or digital poverty, there is definitely an accentuation of that gap. Accessibility is an issue for young people with special educational needs, in the first instance, but added to that is the lack of access to resources over this period and the challenges of remote learning for engagement. It is easy for us to put young people into the silos of financial or learning disadvantage, but one of the levellers of this experience has been the levels of engagement that young people have been able to opt into.

That picture is quite varied. On the evidence that you asked about, research from YouGov tells us that young people with a learning difficulty are, according to their families, finding it much more difficult to focus and engage. It is challenging for all, but 40% of non-learning disabled and

59% of families said that it was very difficult for their young people to engage online for sustained periods. So there is a varied picture.

It is important to say that one of the good things that we have seen is a focus on young people who are vulnerable. There is a real priority around vulnerability and giving young people the opportunity to be in school to learn if they are vulnerable learners, whether that is because they have a learning difficulty or are a child at risk or a child of a critical worker, but vulnerable learners have been in school and that has been helpful. It has allowed greater resource to be focused on those who attend, but attendance is variable. It is dependent on family circumstances, building safety issues and a huge range of rationales. One multi-academy trust, for example, might have a huge number of schools with attendance varying from 10% attendance of vulnerable young people and 70% or 80% attendance.

There is huge variability in access to the school site and to remote devices, and in the capacity to engage with that device. It might be that young people with learning difficulties have found it really challenging to transition to new ways of working. We are seeing gradual improvements as those new routines bed in, but sustaining that and then changing back to the classroom will prove to be another challenge for young people with learning difficulties.

So there are huge challenges, and the disadvantage may have been exacerbated, but huge opportunity comes with that. Talk about the opportunities longer term, for me, will focus on the inclusivity that digital can bring. At this point, we might see the gap widening, but if we can address those gaps and the accessibility issues for young people, there will be huge opportunities for greater inclusion through digital platforms and digital learning opportunities.

Q114 **Baroness Young of Hornsey:** Thank you very much for that, Margaret. Do you have any sense of anything more specific to particular groups within the category, as it were, of those who are learning disabled or have learning difficulties? In health terms, for example, we know that black and minority ethnic people with a learning disability are much more likely to die as a result of contracting Covid, and so on. Do you have any comparable sense of what is going on in the educational sphere?

Margaret Mulholland: That has definitely impacted on the confidence of families to send young people into school. The families of those with an education, health and care plan who have the offer of a place in school are very anxious about those underlying conditions.

There is wide spectrum of special educational needs. For those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, remote learning is more challenging to engage in over long periods of time. However, some fantastic platforms are being used by our special schools to support the learning and development of families.

On the point about focusing resources, a lot of special schools have really embraced a target audience not just of young people but their families, ensuring that they can do things such as preparing adult skills, cookery and singing experiences and so on. These have been targeted at the broader family to enable them to replicate them at home.

For young people who are in mainstream schools—nine in 10 young people with a learning difficulty are in mainstream settings—those who might be struggling with dyslexia, for example, have seen some real advantages in remote learning. These are anecdotal and not consistent across the piece, but there are wonderful examples of young people now using speech-to-text devices and cameras to record their learning—lots of opportunities that may have been available in school, but young people did not like the experience of standing out and being different. That sense of difference was previously often a very excluding factor in the use of technology in school. Now, as more people are using digital strategies at home, we are hoping that they will translate back into the classroom and be transformational.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: Sorry to interrupt you, but I am always aware of the time available, and I want to get comments from others. Some of us have been wondering about what has been happening to those in pupil referral units. Has this come to your attention, James?

James Turner: We have mostly been looking at this issue through the lens of socioeconomic deprivation and class—the difference between working-class and middle-class students. The background to this is that those students were already behind before the pandemic, unfortunately; this has been a stubborn problem in our system.

All the evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation and others suggests that that gap has widened during this period of remote learning. The driver seems to be that what remote learning looks like to a poor child is very different from what it looks like to their classmates: as we have heard, they struggle to access technology and the internet, they are probably less likely to have a quiet place to work, and they have parents who are probably less confident about supporting them or who are working jobs that take them out of the home.

The sum of all that is that, for those students, both the quality and the quantity of the learning that they have had during this period have been lower. On average, they have done fewer hours of learning, and teachers also report that the quality of, and engagement with, that work has been less.

On the long-term impacts of this, as I say, some people are saying that the gap in primary schools between a poor child and their peers is now seven months, and that has grown during the pandemic. We suspect that it is likely to be higher in secondary schools. However, this will not just affect those children's lives for the next one or two years; it will have knock-on impacts on the skills they develop, the qualifications they get and, ultimately, the jobs that they go on to do and their chances of being

socially mobile. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has done some work, as have we, on trying to quantify that long-term loss—the fact that they will earn less in their lifetimes as a result of this pandemic and what is happening in schools now. This is a significant issue, and we think it needs a significant response.

We know that poorer children are more likely to be in pupil referral units than other groups, but we have not looked specifically at that group. We are still crunching some of the data, but I would be happy to take that away to see if some of the surveys that we have done of teachers and parents are big enough also to pick up some of those trends in pupil referral units.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: That would be useful, thank you. Bearing in mind that your focus is obviously on financial and economic inequalities and the intersection between those categories, could you also address the extent to which race and ethnicity are factors here? Certainly, if you are a black boy, you are much more likely to end up in a PRU than if you are from a working-class background, so it is not just about class; it is also about these other issues.

Richard Sheriff: I will start by addressing a word that I took from Margaret's evidence: "variability". It is very hard to gather data and empirically say, "I know how this has affected particular groups", but I can offer some anecdotal observations that are backed up by evidence from head teachers across the country.

The evidence base here is still fairly tenuous, because we had not had the opportunity to gather it sufficiently so that people like James can help us. However, there are a number of things to say. I will start with positives. The inertia that has kept the education system in one mode for so long has finally been overcome by a horrible pandemic. That inertia has almost been a built-in inability to realise the potential of technology to transform learning. I am afraid I am one of those people who for many years has been saying, "We need to have a digital strategy, a way we can use technology positively to reach every child and improve how we do things".

We have found that our recipe of piling lots of children into one big building in groups of 30 every day and seeing them come back and forth and causing traffic chaos is not only environmentally and probably educationally problematic; it also has significant health and vulnerability issues. Yet we have had technology all around us for so long and have not been able to use it. It is now being used far more, but it is still in its infancy.

I see teachers innovating brilliantly around this. Margaret mentioned the accessibility function in speech recognition, which exists in all Apple and Microsoft software and has done for years, but we never use it. We are now starting to think about how we can use it. What we are doing today is transformational, reducing the friction of distance so that we can now connect with children who are working at home.

We are also seeing some really good stuff in relation to our most vulnerable children, for whom school is a frightening and difficult place. Some of the children who have specific difficulties with that are finding this mode of blended learning—online and in school, with appropriate support—working really well for them.

We are finding that the idea of flipped learning, whereby children are doing more to support their own learning but relying on teachers for tuition and one-to-one support, could be a really positive way forward. That is a way in which learning is not defined by being at school from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm and then going home, having done your bit for the day. It is pervasive and runs outside that boundary, with children taking ownership of their learning. Technology is enabling that to happen. I cannot overemphasise the exponential increase and improvement in the use of technology to support learning across primary, secondary and special schools. It really is something.

However, there has to be a “but”, and there are a number of them. We have talked about accessibility. One of the schools in my trust has 2,000 students in a well-to-do area; every single child has an iPad through an iPad scheme that we developed eight or nine years ago. We are really used to using that mode, and this has not been a challenge for those children and families. It really has not. It has been very high quality from the get-go.

However, another of our schools serving one of the most deprived areas in the city of Leeds says that only 30% of its families have access to broadband. When we say, “But you can use the Government’s brilliant new scheme”, they say, “We don’t want to give you our mobile phones”, because in some of these communities their trust in the state is low. They worry about how that information would be used.

More than that—this is very worrying, and we are all aware of it—even over the last year, there has been an acceleration in that lack of trust in the state, driven by social media and by the whole “fake news” issue. So when you say to them, “You’re safe to come into school because the virus is controlled here and we have measures in place”, they do not believe you. If you say, “Give us your mobile number”, or you give them your mobile number, they do not believe you and think that something else is going on here. That erosion of trust has made it more difficult, particularly for some of those harder-to-reach communities that we and many people serve across the country. We have to get the trust bit right. Our messaging needs to be consistent, evidence-based and clear for all our communities.

However, it is wrong to catastrophise young people at this stage. An awful lot has been written about the Covid generation, but now we are saying, “Can we not identify our children with a disease”, label them alongside a disease? This generation is remarkable in what it is managing to do, coping incredibly well with this whole change in how they are being educated and with the awfulness of being removed from their peers.

We all understand, better than we did before, the vital link that schools play in their social development. This generation are coping with it. They are learning new skills and independence, and they are learning to use the new world around them. They could even be in a better state than previous generations. So the language that we use about these young people is so important. If we say, "Well, they've got no chance, they've been damaged and we have to do catch up with them because they are somehow missing out", that is not helpful. We need to get behind this generation and use language that is more appropriate for them.

Variability is a massive issue for communities—indeed, you can see that there is variability in every school—and that has been made worse by the variability of the impacts of the virus. There is an awful lot going on at once. You have a profession that has risen to the challenge really well, although some have more capacity than others. The situation has reinforced and accelerated difference. The children who struggle at school, and they could come from any socioeconomic background—let us say we are talking about boys who lack motivation—have not engaged well with independent learning, whatever the focus. They have used it as another excuse not to do stuff, and they are hard to reach. Social deprivation has made it harder for those from socially deprived backgrounds to gain access, so that gap has got wider. We have seen existing trends exacerbated.

The opposite is also true. If you have a family at home who are all graduates and who have a library at home—bookshelves like the ones I see here on this call—you are set up. You have face-to-face contact and you have technology. Some of those children will be accelerating during this process. They will be taking the opportunity to do more, not less, and will be encouraged to do so.

For me, this is without doubt accelerating and widening gaps, making differences greater, but we can also see that we have the potential to do better, following on from this in the longer term, where we can use technology and what we have learned to help to close the gap and make education fairer, more high-quality and more diverse.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: There were some very interesting points there, particularly the issue of a lack of trust and the higher visibility of difference, which has its own impact. Natalie, do you have anything to add to those comments?

Natalie Perera: I have a few additional points. It is worth going back to what the position was for disadvantaged young people before the pandemic even hit. Back in 2019, before the pandemic, disadvantaged pupils were already over 18 months, on average, behind their peers by the end of secondary school. That gap was much wider for children with SEND or who were looked after by the state. We were also seeing a widening of the gap for some children from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly black Caribbean pupils; in the eight years up to 2019, the gap between black Caribbean pupils and white British pupils had widened by a further four months—in fact, well over four months.

The pandemic has done two things. First, it has shed light on the state of inequality between different types of disadvantaged families and the rest. Secondly, as we have been discussing, it is likely to have worsened those inequalities and widened those gaps. Much of the data that has been collected over the last nine months since the first period of lockdown has tended to focus on socioeconomic disadvantage. As we have heard, data from the IFS and others have found that, on a number of indicators, children from disadvantaged households or poorer households have less access to digital devices and a quiet place to study, they are participating in fewer hours of online learning, and they have less face-to-face online contact with teachers than their peers. So across a range of indicators we are seeing the gap widening between disadvantaged children and their peers.

On pupils with SEND, Margaret is clearly much more of an expert here, but some of the feedback that we have been hearing is interesting. They are not a homogeneous group of children, as Margaret said, and we have been hearing from school leaders that there are some who have found it easier to learn at home. If they have autism or other sensory issues, being at home in a quiet and familiar environment can sometimes be easier. However, that is not the case for many pupils with SEND who would struggle, and are struggling, without the additional support that they might usually have in school.

The data has also been telling us about regional variations. There was regional variation in the participation in online learning, but also, when schools went back and were fully reopened during the autumn term, we were seeing significant regional variation in attendance rates too, which was understandably correlated with Covid transmission rates over that period. When we think about what the short-term or long-term interventions might be, we need to look along the lines of pupil background, but we also need to think about looking at particular areas of the country that might have lost more time than others.

On the point about pupil referral units, in May last year we published a report with a series of recommendations for the Government to try to mitigate the impact of lost learning time due to Covid. Alongside a very clear recommendation to double the pupil premium funding for certain year groups, we also recommended that the Government make funding available for post-16 pupils to stay in alternative provision, including PRUs.

At the moment, we have a gap. Many of our most vulnerable pupils tend to be in alternative provision and PRUs, but when they hit 16 they suddenly face a cliff edge where they have to go to an FE college, into an apprenticeship or just out into the big wide world, because there is no funding available for post-16 provision in these settings. It makes a lot of sense in terms of policy and social mobility to keep them in their current school—that is, their AP setting—beyond the age of 16 to help with consolidating their learning but also to improve their transition to the next phase.

Those are the initial points that I wanted to make. I know we will come on in a moment to some of the longer-term proposals.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: Thank you very much to everyone. Great answers there.

Q115 **Lord Alderdice:** It is clear that we have an enormous set of issues here and we are only going to be able to touch on some of the important ones. One that strikes me is that it is actually quite difficult to assess what is happening rather than what we think might happen until the kids get back to school and we can actually measure things.

One of the questions that you may or may not be able to refer to is the difference between children from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. I am interested in whether much research work has been done on children who have been attending school—many have—because they are vulnerable by background or they are the children of front-line workers, and on children from similar backgrounds who have not been attending school. That would be an interesting issue to explore. If you have any experience of that or you know of research work on it, that would be great.

Another issue that I want to pick up is the question of the long-term implications for educational attainment. There are some things that you can catch up on by doing them later, but some are so foundational that if you do not get them it is very difficult to build on them. It is not just an educational issue; the children I have been speaking to, mostly online, have mentioned the social dimension. There are developmental milestones, as much as educational attainments, that may not be able to be replaced very easily later on. This is one of the differences between adult education and the education of children, who are developing: at certain stages they can pick issues up in a way that is not possible for them at other stages. These are physical and social developments as well as educational attainments.

What do you feel are the medium-term to long-term implications of these two dimensions of things: educational attainment, and developmental milestones that may be physical or social—or others?

Natalie Perera: There are a couple of things that I think are worth mentioning. We need to have a better understanding of how much learning has been lost during the pandemic. We know roughly how much time most pupils have spent out of school due to the lockdown period, but we do not yet have an indication of how that has translated into their actual lost learning and how far behind they are. EPI has been doing some work on this on behalf of the Department for Education, and we hope that the department will publish that work, or at least the initial report looking at data from the autumn term when most children came back to school, fairly soon, since that will improve public understanding about the true scale of lost learning.

As we have heard, there is also a very likely impact on children's well-being. We know from NHS data in July last year that the rates of children

and young people who were suffering from a probable mental illness has increased over the last few years, and we expect some of that increase to be in light of the pandemic. So government strategies need to be twofold. They need to look at the academic catch-up for pupils but also at what can be done to support pupils' well-being. That really needs to be embedded into any policies that the Government come up with.

There are three broad options now for the Government in considering how to support or mitigate against the impact of lost learning. The first is a set of options that would turbocharge or accelerate existing initiatives and interventions. I talked about doubling the pupil premium, which is one of our key recommendations from last year; providing more funding for post-16 provision, or indeed providing funding for it at all in alternative provision; and potentially providing more funding through the National Tutoring Programme and expanding that over the shorter term.

The second set of options probably falls into the more radical space. They are ideas that have been discussed quite widely among the sector and on social media. They include activities such as extending the school day or the school term, putting in place summer programmes that could be targeted or aimed at supporting a combination of academic catch-up, well-being and physical activity, or indeed having the option for some young people to repeat the school year.

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt you, Natalie. We are going to come specifically to recommendations later in the session. Please feel free to bank them in your mind, but we are going to come back to them. I am conscious that John has a lot of other questions to get through.

Natalie Perera: I am happy to come back to the recommendations later, then.

Lord Alderdice: Would any of the other three colleagues like to pick up on these issues?

Margaret Mulholland: Having listened carefully to everything that Natalie was saying and your point about attainment and milestones, I think it is really important that we do not see those things as binary, which is what Natalie was articulating as well. We should not just focus on attainment and then tackle well-being. We actually need to think about how, in order to learn and engage better, we need to invest more heavily in attributes such as well-being and the scaffolding for well-being.

This should not be done separately—coming back to school, doing three weeks on well-being and then moving on to thinking about attainment and catch-up. Rather, we need to make sure that we have a programme of enrichment so that instead of lost learning we are thinking about "catch-up", for want of a better term, through enrichment opportunities so that we can really build engagement, motivation, confidence and self-esteem for learning for those young people.

We talked before about the gap widening for those who are disadvantaged. Many young people who are disadvantaged lack self-esteem and friendship groups. The statistics on young people with learning difficulties in relation to loneliness are quite frightening. The PISA data on teenagers' satisfaction with their life as a 16 year-old are quite terrifying for the UK. We need to be mindful of those things when we think about the question "What next?", and really think about how we focus on enrichment in order to close those gaps.

We must use digital to foster inclusivity. We have heard some positive things about blended opportunities. If we are going to think seriously about transitioning reluctant learners, and indeed reluctant families, back into school, we need to think very carefully about rebuilding the trust that Richard talked about, and the trust in our schools to make good judgments about their local community of young people and who needs a staggered or blended approach to learning in future and who is ready to return to a honeymoon period of coming back together.

Trust will be a big factor in that blended approach and that enrichment, because local school leaders know their community very well and can assess the needs without a one-size-fits-all approach. We need to have faith in that knowledge as we go back to school.

Lord Alderdice: Richard, a number of the things that are being said could have been said before the pandemic. They are general things about development, societal difficulties and so on. You have made it clear that labelling this generation the "Covid generation" is negative. Nevertheless, they are going through an experience that a previous generation never had to go through and which, we desperately hope, the next generation will not have to.

Can you say how this rather complex picture varies for different groups of children from different backgrounds? You have referred to some of the students and pupils who you have responsibility for and their very different backgrounds. Can you compare them and help us to understand that?

Richard Sheriff: There are two words that I am going to use, the two Vs: variability and vulnerability. They are crucial for us. We see a lot of both.

I will give you an example of an inner-city estate in the north of England, as I described before, with very high levels of deprivation. The head teacher of a brilliant local primary school named Helen—it makes it easier if I say her name—is trying her best to meet their needs. I, as a trust leader, think I know what will work really well there. I will get the devices ready and do all those things, but, actually, she needs something quite different. The way they have developed contact with parents has been refined over a number of years to try to draw those parents in to have confidence and trust in the school. Going back to Margaret's point, one size fits all does not work for them. We are now into February and there has been no National Tutoring Programme input into those children

whatever. We hope that will start soon, but, my goodness, that is a delay.

We can try to back off some of those big, national, complex programmes, which tend to generalise all these things and work on the average, and target the resource to where it is really needed. Let us also not waste expense where we are overdelivering. We recognised earlier that some children have really thrived during this process. I cannot say what proportion, as we need to do more research on that. We should not be putting more in, but we need to target resource to where the need is greatest and put the decisions about how it is used into the hands of school leaders who know the community and the schools. However, hold them to account for the impact of that additional resource. That is really important.

Going forward, there will be a danger from having a multitude of different external initiatives that are hard for schools to handle and are not focused on specific needs. They just look as if we are really busy, but they do not have an impact. That is a real danger. We do not want another lot of high-profile projects. We need a consistent approach to focusing our efforts where they are needed most: on vulnerable children, those with SEND, those who are falling back, and those, perhaps in more privileged communities, who have failed to engage. A lot of them will be boys, and I think there will be a big and opening gap this year between boys' and girls' attainment. Let us focus forensically on where the need is and give opportunity locally to meet that need. That should be the way we operate from now on: we identify need, give the task to the locality, let them get on with it, and we will measure the outcomes.

James Turner: I completely agree with the idea of working on both the well-being and the academic attainment sides, seeing them as interconnected and self-reinforcing. That is right. A great report came out yesterday from an organisation called ImpactEd, which looked in detail at 60,000 students and their experience of well-being during the pandemic. It picked up a lot of concerns about mental health and stress, particularly for years 10 and 11. That gives us a good platform to understand those issues.

As we have already heard, it is hard enough to be forensic and precise about the nature of the present problems in academic attainment, let alone the solutions and how to go about resolving them. Those challenges are amplified on the well-being side. What exactly does this look like in schools, and how do we go about addressing those needs in a sophisticated way? I know that we are coming on to talk about solutions, but I completely agree that any solutions need to be targeted. We do not want universal solutions; we want solutions to be targeted at those in most need who, for us, are the poorer students in particular. I agree with Richard that, although we support the National Tutoring Programme, any big national initiatives need to be balanced with resources that go to schools locally to make targeted decisions about what is best in their own context.

Lord Alderdice: Would anybody like to say whether any particular steps need to be taken to support those who are due to sit GCSE, A-level or other exams this year, who may have had difficulties with their education because of the pandemic?

Richard Sheriff: I represent secondary school head teachers, who bear the burden of both last year and this year in trying to get the right grades to children, and when I speak to young people, as I am sure you are doing, I find that the biggest thing they want is certainty: "What will happen?", "How will I be judged this year and will my grade be worth anything?" There is work in progress now on how we can do that. We cannot turn back the clock. It would have been nice to have had that much earlier, but this is where we are.

The first thing to do is to make sure that we engage with our young people as soon as possible and explain what is going on. Again, it comes back to winning back the trust and confidence that have been lost. We need to say to them that we value them, as young people, and will ensure right across the country that what happens this year will in no way prevent them from being able to progress to the next stage of their lives. How can we do that? We will do our very best to make sure that the grades they are awarded are meaningful. We are not giving out chocolate money; we are giving out real currency that they can use to give them opportunities in life. We can reassure them about those grades and that process. That will make a massive difference.

We can also say to them that we really understand where they are and that everybody, from the world of commerce to the public sector, understands this and will know it when it comes through. It will not stand in their way. That will be enormously helpful.

Then we have to think about how we assess children in the future, so that we are not in this position again. Although we are all trying to do the best for young people and the system, we have unwittingly become overreliant on an examination system that has very high stakes and is delivered in a rather archaic way. I often cite the example of my young son. He is a junior doctor now, but during five years of medical school he did not sit a single examination paper. All the assessment was online or was practical, in his line of work. If we can use that kind of online assessment in one of those high-status professions, surely we can adapt how we do assessments for young people.

How we do GCSE and A-level assessments is really important, but also when we do it. Lord Baker speaks very well in the debate about whether GCSEs should continue, whether we need that stop at 16 any more, and high-stakes testing. If that were removed, enlightened people would say that it was a checkpoint, because what is really important is what you can achieve at 17 or 18, as you go into employment, training or university—wherever you are going. That is the important bit: removing some of the high stakes for young people, so that they can focus on getting a broader education and really digging deep into the knowledge-based curriculum,

but also into their personal well-being and the habits and behaviours that will support them to be healthy, happy individuals in later life.

Young people now are particularly anxious, and many of them are girls. A higher proportion of girls than boys are really anxious, driven by the examination results and high-stakes tests at 16 and again at 18. Their health and well-being have been suffering in an ongoing way, and this has exacerbated that.

Lord Alderdice: I am beginning to get a bit anxious about the time, Richard. I wonder if I could perhaps hand back to the chair, because there are a lot of other questions from colleagues.

The Chair: There are so many points there that we could drill down on. I remind everyone that if they would like to submit extra written evidence to us because they feel that there are answers they have not been able to give to the questions, we would be really grateful.

Q116 **Lord Hain:** This has been fascinating. To what extent do you think a long-term impact of the pandemic will be the increasing use of digital technology in education? I notice that in her statement Natalie referred to hybrid approaches, and we as a committee are interested in that.

Margaret Mulholland: There is huge potential for hybrid approaches. We are hearing anecdotal stories of young people. I spoke yesterday to a London parent of a young man about to do his GCSEs who has a diagnosis of autism and ADHD. He has found the opportunity to learn online really valuable, as he has been able to revisit lessons and has had pre-teaching for lessons. Lots of the strategies that we encourage all teachers to develop in support of young people with special educational needs are actually becoming part and parcel of remote teaching, such as video-recorded lessons that young people can revisit with their parents, the overlearning that they can do at the end of a school day. That opportunity should not go away. We must hold on to those opportunities, because young people have found them incredibly valuable.

In the household that I am about to talk about, the parent asked me to say that she is a working-class parent with a disability herself. She has been sitting alongside her son to work through the day, as well as him having access to one-to-one support for his special educational needs. When he has had to get up to move around because of the difficulty he has in focusing, she has used a sound beam to make sure that the lessons follow him around the house, and he has been able to continue to engage. There are great examples of creativity.

I then asked her what the dilemma about going back to school would be. If this had worked so well for him, how did she feel about the return to school, where he would not have autonomy and control to such a degree, and where those assisted technology resources have not been as apparent. She said that she hopes these things will translate back into the classroom and that he and indeed teachers will feel more confident about using them, but she also recognised the social connectedness that

is so valuable to his development. She feels that the opportunity to address a blended approach, a hybrid approach, of some learning at home, maybe a couple of afternoons a week, and in school would really support his learning. However, again, we come back to the challenge of what that might look like and how it cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach but has to be based on the absolutely targeted needs of young people.

Lord Hain: That is quite exciting, actually. I had not thought about that. However, what about children, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, if the future is to be hybrid?

Margaret Mulholland: Again that comes back to the question of accessibility, does it not? Everyone has to have personal access to a resource, not just household access. That is the equality that we need to address first and foremost in order to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to work remotely and a place to do it, or at least that they can access the resources from school that they utilise. We still have a huge gap in that, which is phenomenal 10 months into a pandemic.

Lord Hain: James, you were nodding vigorously there. Do you have anything to add to that?

James Turner: A lot of our research has focused on the downsides of the pandemic, such as the gap between those who can fully participate in remote learning and those who cannot, but, as others have said, there has been a lot of innovation in the use of technology because of the pandemic. I think of the Oak National Academy, which is a great online resource where brilliant teachers all over the country record their lessons. That is now available to every child and parent in the country, and it would not otherwise have been. Another example is the National Tutoring Programme, although it is not perfect. Because of the pandemic and because of the technology, tens of thousands of children are now getting online tuition this week.

So there are definitely those upsides. We have also talked about the fact that teachers have very quickly upskilled and become proficient in digital, which I think gives a great platform to build on. I guess our sense is that if we are really going to realise the full potential of that and democratise and open up these opportunities, as Margaret says we need to address the digital divide. That is urgent now, but it will be just as important in three years' time, because digital will become more important than we could ever have thought pre-pandemic.

We also need to guard against the assumption that technology always equals progress, because some of the evidence I have seen suggests that, particularly in education, the quality of the content, the teaching and the pedagogy are more important than whether it is face to face or online. We need to make sure that we invest in teachers and staff so that they can make the most of these opportunities, otherwise it could be a gap-widener. It could be that the savvy, well-resourced schools and

parents take advantage of these opportunities and so the gap widens between those who can and those who cannot.

Lord Hain: Richard, do you think the future is hybrid for education?

Richard Sheriff: Yes, I do. I reinforce what James has said, though. My worry too is that schools with all the advantages and savvy parents will do very well out of this blended offer, but those who do not have access will struggle. I think that is very much the case.

I think we can do something. I know this is controversial, but access to the internet is almost a basic need, like access to water and electricity for every home. It is hard to see how you can have a society split across that digital divide. That would help enormously.

We have a scheme at the moment where we are asking people to contribute last year's laptops so that we can refurbish them and get them out to students and families. Another 10 were delivered by a local company yesterday, and it is fantastic that we are getting that into place.

So there is a really positive feature of that blended offer. It is also there as a failsafe, because, although I hate to think it, this might happen again. We need to be ready so that we have plan B ready to move and we can go from blended to remote and the other way round. I think we are getting far more capable in that area, but we need to get that connectivity in place and unlock that particular problem.

Lord Hain: Natalie, did you have anything to add? I spotted that phrase in your statement. Will the school day be in the classroom during the "normal day" and then digital at home, or are we going to get a completely different picture of schooling and education?

Natalie Perera: It is important to stress that no one, I think, is arguing that in normal times we would want to replace face-to-face teaching, which has the strongest evidence base, with a drastic move to online learning. As we have heard, though, the pandemic has forced schools and families to operate differently and to adapt to new ways of learning. Particular lessons that we could learn are that for pupils who in normal times might need to be out of school for a prolonged period—they may have a mobility issue or they are having long-term treatment, or indeed there are severe weather conditions; in the past, we have seen schools closed fully due to flooding or snow—we now have the infrastructure and, I would argue, the confidence to deliver some learning remotely so that we are not in a binary system of schools having to close or certain pupils not being able to attend the school and therefore learning stops entirely. That is one of the positive things that have come out of the pandemic.

However online learning is embedded into teaching and learning post-pandemic, we need to be very alive to the impact and to how it works for certain groups of children, particularly those with SEND, who might otherwise struggle with access. That aside, the pandemic has brought opportunities that could help us in the longer term, but I do not think

anyone is arguing that digital learning should replace face-to-face teacher instruction to any significant degree.

Lord Hain: Thank you. Richard, you have your hand up?

Richard Sheriff: I want to pick up some of the points raised about things that we have now learned. On the point that James made, technology does not mean that everything is great. The online-learning pedagogy that is now being developed is really interesting and getting more sophisticated and effective. That is the first thing: pedagogy will change and adapt.

However, there is a risk that we will do what has happened historically and snap back into the position we were in before. That is a danger, because we could do that and we would lose what we have gained. The pedagogy is now adapting so that it is effective as a learning tool rather than as an ornament.

The second thing, to pick up Lord Hain's point, is about whether this affects the structure of the school day. I think it can and probably should: sometimes, some children are in school and do not need to be. Year 13 students go back and forth to school or college every day, but, actually, they could have a time-shifted day, with two days of remote learning and three in school. That split for certain year groups could work very well. It could be advantageous in all kinds of ways.

However, more importantly, inside the school, one of the advantages that we now have is the opportunity to meet people without the friction of distance, which means that we can make sure that the best teachers are accessible to more children. In primary schools now, there will be a teacher teaching two or three groups online together, because they are the English lead in that key stage, so they are doing the English input. They will then go from that into a stage where they see other teachers, who are building on that work, to get their input. That is a more flexible way of using the teacher workforce and the expertise out there, using the medium of the technology.

As such, there are a number of pedagogical, organisational and resource-based ways in which technology can help us if we take the opportunity to shape it as we need to.

Q117 **Baroness Jay of Paddington:** You have all talked very interestingly about the way in which improving resources could help with the digital divide and improve the way we do online learning. Is there scope for you to address how digital skills themselves might be taught better and whether, particularly in secondary schools, we have the capability from the teaching staff to do that? For example, if you want to prepare children at secondary age to work in a market and a world where digital skills are particularly important, do we need to include this in a new form of the national curriculum?

Richard Sheriff: Yes.

Margaret Mulholland: Yes.

Baroness Jay of Paddington: Those were some immediate responses. Richard, can you start developing that?

Richard Sheriff: If we are honest, we have been a bit obsessive about developing computer studies, to the detriment of using computers. Very few of us will end up as programmers, and most who do probably come from countries with lower wages and availability of highly trained staff. There might be a bit of a diversion there.

However, developing digital skills, as you describe it, is absolutely vital. I do not know if I am the same as you, but we tend to use a tiny bit of potential of what is in front of us every day. We could unlock some of more of that and increase productivity in both school and the workplace. Digital skills need to be there and written in throughout.

It is probably the children who need to teach us—

Baroness Jay of Paddington: That is why I mentioned the skills of the teaching staff and whether they need to be improved.

Richard Sheriff: That is really interesting. Throughout early teacher education and the new programme there, there need to be digital skills: you cannot be a teacher unless you are a digital teacher. That is so important, and we need to get the word across. It is not just about enthusiasts and geeks, it is a core requirement, and we need to have a standard curriculum for teachers so that they learn all the way through to be capable of keeping up with the children. I think the children will learn massively quickly and adapt readily to what we do with them, but teachers need to be kept in front of it—from the perspective of their confidence.

We have seen that a lot of modern software is intuitive, particularly if you are younger, apparently, so children are using it. They are not inhibited and worried about breaking something; they just get on it and do stuff, creating solutions to things and using technology very quickly. Our teachers are the same: they have been doing exactly that now, innovating and stretching the technology. Every day, if you go to schools across the country, you will see things happening that were not happening before. We need that basic core training for children and teachers as well as allowing their ingenuity to fly and giving them support and encouragement.

Baroness Jay of Paddington: Margaret, you said “Yes” to my original question pretty quickly as well.

Margaret Mulholland: We hope that every teacher teaches all children, particularly those with special educational needs. One opportunity at our disposal now is that, for the first time, we have put young people who are vulnerable learners at the centre of our thinking—we genuinely have. Every school is thinking of this group as a priority. To be brutally honest, it was usually an afterthought because of the exam system and our

attainment focus in relation to how we measure a successful education system. There is now an opportunity to look at our education system differently and use technology to support that.

Interestingly, one of the secondary schools that I work with in Camden did a digital survey. Afterwards, it felt that it was less inclusive as a school than the workplace prior to lockdown, because it was not drawing on the skills and technology that were available. It said that it recognised that simple things about the skills that young people had were not aligned to their learning: they did not know how to save files and they were not using Excel when they were learning maths at a sophisticated level. As such, we could celebrate these digital opportunities.

One of our head teachers—he put this in an email to Richard and me—said that he would love to see a digital passport so that we are not saying, “There’s a threshold here that you’ve got to get over in order to recognise that you’ve succeeded digitally as a young person. Actually, you can gather the skills as you move through your education and build your digital profile through your learning”. Those opportunities must not be lost at this point. We have a great opportunity.

Young people who struggle to learn should be the young people we learn from. The whole notion of universal design for learning is that you look at those who struggle the most and design your system around the young people at the margins, rather than saying, “What will suit the majority, who learn typically?” We have an opportunity to do that, so we need to look at the learning challenges in terms of the investment that we put into digital so that we are not just creating lovely platforms that do not match the pedagogical challenges that we face. There is a great opportunity in that respect.

James Turner: I completely agree. I know that we are going to come on to some solutions from the pandemic and a two to five-year plan, but a central plank of that should absolutely be investing in teacher quality and professional development. Without a doubt, digital skills should be a core part of that. From the pupils’ perspective—this goes to Richard’s point about all the upheaval in A-levels and GCSEs—there is a chance to look afresh at what 14-to-18 education looks like. Clearly, in that debate, digital skills and preparing young people for the workforce of the future should be a really important part of that.

Baroness Jay of Paddington: Natalie, any thoughts from you before I hand over?

Natalie Perera: There are two things for us to consider when we think about digital upskilling. The first is making sure that new programmes are, as far as possible, rooted in evidence. There is a market now for more educational digital programmes, and it is important that teachers and school leaders understand which of those programmes are likely to be the most beneficial.

Secondly, the whole question about how we teach digital skills opens up the wider issue of teacher supply, particularly teachers who are qualified to teach in STEM subjects. We know that, first, there is a high demand for those teachers overall and, secondly, in some of the poorest areas of the country we see the lowest levels of STEM teachers, particularly in maths and physics. If we are thinking about how to upskill teachers, we also need to think about the allocation of those teachers to the most hard-to-reach and challenging areas.

The Chair: I know that Baroness Morgan wanted to ask a quick supplementary question.

Baroness Morgan of Cotes: This is a very quick point about something that Richard said, and I think James picked up on it. Is a specific recommendation coming out of all this the need for teacher training to be re-examined, particularly in the light of pedagogy and teaching having to be hybrid and not just the traditional face to face? Given that we are looking ahead, should we be pointing to that in our report? Richard, you have the most front-line experience. If the others want to come in, they are welcome to do so, but I do not want to take up too much time.

Richard Sheriff: Part of my role is running a teacher training programme with 160 trainees, and we are a teaching school hub, so I am very interested in this. The early career framework offers the opportunity to do this better. We should absolutely build this into the structure of the system to make sure that all our teachers are confident when they come into school and continue to develop their skills, because the skills that we need them to have will change every day. That is a very useful recommendation.

Margaret Mulholland: If we do that, we should do it through the lens of inclusivity. How do we enable technology to enhance inclusivity? That is an ongoing challenge for our schools and our society at the moment. If we build it in, we must do so with that particular focus in mind.

Q118 **Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen:** I think most of my questions have been answered, but I would like to ask you a bit more about the curriculum. Do you think we have to completely rethink our GCSEs and A-levels for the future? Are they really right for what we are looking for in two to five years' time, with all the technology and the innovations around that?

Richard Sheriff: There is a need for reform, but we do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We know that there has been much discussion about cultural capital and what children learn through a strong knowledge-based curriculum, but there has been a lot of obsession about whether we are interested in a knowledge-based curriculum or a skills-based one.

Of course, both seem a bit ridiculous; it is about a blend of the two, really, and we have to get it right. Is that blend right at the moment to equip children with what they need for the future? There are some big

doubts about that. I am seeing that more and more, as I see young people coming back from jobs. I ask, "How did that relate to what you did in A-level and so forth?", and they look a little bit askance at you. We are in danger of having a set of qualifications that have not quite caught up with what the world needs them to be. At the same time, there is a root of knowledge that we know is valuable, cultural knowledge that we want people to keep.

Sometimes when we talk about reform of the curriculum it is immediately seen as a dumbing-down approach, trying to do less, but I do not think that is the case. We have seen that the vocational curriculum, if we can call it that, has been denuded and seen as less worthwhile, when actually it is vital to what we do. As I say, the vocation of medicine is never seen as low-status but other vocations are. So we have to get the right balance of the vocational and practical, together with that rich knowledge base and cultural heritage of our world. It is not right yet.

The key question is how we segment that up. Do we really think it is important to have an examination at 16 in the way we do now? More and more people are saying probably not. Those high-stakes examinations and the accountability that goes along with them have driven behaviours in school that do not promote health and well-being. They do not promote the broader balanced curriculum that you might see in a traditional independent school, where they have all these extras around it. We are just focused on getting to markers, to the binary question of, "Did you get a Progress 8 score of plus or minus?" That is all we want to know, and that is what is driving schools.

So the curriculum is driven by an examination system and an accountability system that are leading to something that does not really meet the needs of our learners, and it certainly works against inclusion in all its forms. That is absolutely the case. We have what we in our school have labelled "the forgotten third", the children who are deemed not to have reached level 4—and therefore what do they have? A fundamental rethink is needed.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: Margaret, do you want to come in and say how digital can help with that?

Margaret Mulholland: From an inclusion perspective, the opportunities are definitely huge. At the moment, a young person with special educational needs who does not get maths and English first time round might spend the next four years taking a predominant course of maths and English again and again, and some of those young people—I can feel my heart getting faster as I say this because it makes me so angry—have taken these exams four times over. The awful thing about this is that they may actually spend one year doing it at a level 2, then the following year they will have to move college to do another course and they will take it at level 1, and then they might go back and do it at level 2 again.

That is not a developmental pathway for young people with special educational needs; it is reductive and insulting, and it damages self-

esteem and their opportunities to get into the workplace early. An online opportunity will enrich possibilities and employability if we do it well and start early, and if we start to value what young people can achieve rather than what they have failed to gain and how we can catch up on that basis, because if they are not going to get that English and maths there is not really anything else for them. We are increasingly looking at a landscape that looks like that.

We have to look at digital. A lot of young people with special educational needs are really talented in this area and could teach us a huge amount. The possibilities are endless in that respect.

James Turner: Despite the upheaval that it would cause, this is a good moment to look again at what we do in the 14-to-18 space with GCSE and A-levels. We as a country are quite unusual in having this broad base of GCSEs and then some students specialising at A-level in just three subjects, which impacts the ecosystem around those qualifications. One of the things to consider is the broader 14-to-19 baccalaureate-style approach that they have in other countries. Obviously that may suit some students more than others, but it should be something that we look at seriously, and now is a good opportunity to do so.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: Thank you.

The Chair: I will just bring in Lord Hain to ask a quick supplementary, before we move to Baroness Benjamin and the question on specific recommendations.

Q119 **Lord Hain:** We have touched on this but not really explored it. Is not an important part of physically being in the classroom and on school premises the socialisation of children? In a hybrid situation, or a predominantly digital one, do you not just lose all that?

Natalie Perera: I completely agree. I do not think anyone is arguing that, once the pandemic is over or is easier to manage, children should not be at school. There are well-being and socialisation benefits from being in school and among your peer groups, but there is also a safety aspect to it. It is not irrelevant that, during the period of school closure, vulnerable children have been encouraged and allowed to come into school because, in many cases, it is safer for them to be there than at home. If we do not have pupils coming into school, it is very difficult to know whether they need a referral to other statutory services, for example. Schools play an incredibly important role as hubs for families and communities, and help to identify any problems early on. The benefits from being in school are threefold: academic, social and well-being, and the safety and safeguarding elements.

Richard Sheriff: There is an opportunity here, but perhaps this is fanciful. One thing that has happened, certainly in secondary education, is that a lot of the nice stuff that involves socialisation—it might be team sports, drama, clubs or societies—has been squeezed out. When I started as a teacher 33 years ago, we always ran clubs, societies and so forth. In

a traditional large state comprehensive, those things are so trimmed back now. I wonder whether we can do some of that learning outside the school day, when we are all packed together. If we say, "Take your three assignments. They are online. Look at this", et cetera, it will allow time within the school day to bring some of that stuff back.

The advantage of being together is that you do things together. Often, we bring them into schools to sit them apart. We sit them in seats in a room, and they are rigid and look at the front. When we bring them together, we could do things that require them to be together to do. Make the movement into school really worthwhile to work on those interactive and social skills, those creative moments, and that sense of fellowship, belonging and community that will give them the life skills that make them confident adults who can contribute positively to society. Maybe that is an opportunity that digital can give us.

Margaret Mulholland: I am conscious that one thing we have not mentioned is being mindful of online harms. We are talking positively about the possibilities of technology to supplement our offer, not to replace it. In line with that, we have to think about the professional development of teachers and the learning of families about the risks of being online. We still have quite a lot of work to do on that. We are collecting data over this period. I think that 25% of girls have experienced some form of sexual harassment online during the lockdown period.

Young people develop life tools if we support them well and they are given the tools to own the online space more effectively, but we need more professional learning for that to happen. As others have mentioned, the opportunities for discussions like this on Zoom and elsewhere have brought great potential for CPD for teachers, but we have to keep the safeguarding risks from online learning in mind, as well as the opportunities.

Q120 **The Chair:** This is the Chair's prerogative, but I am going to jump in before I hand over to Baroness Benjamin to get the specific recommendations. Particularly on the back of Baroness Chisholm's question about whether we should change and move away from GCSEs and A-levels, I am conscious that we have not specifically asked you what you think the biggest changes in education might be in two to five years.

I would be interested to hear if any of you have ideas, specifically on what technology might enable if we are as innovative or creative as you can imagine. I am keen to capture what positive and even negative shifts there might be in that longer-term view. Does anybody have any future-facing thoughts about reinventing the system or how it might be changed?

Richard Sheriff: There are lots of things, but one positive is that the technology is more than just about young people accessing learning, but about teachers and our workforce. We have just been looking at this in the Trust, and we know that other trusts and organisations do it really

well. We have great expertise in little pockets, not well spread. This has always been the case with a brilliant individual teacher: if you have that teacher, you are quids in and that is fantastic, but they are not everywhere.

One advantage you might have is from sharing that goodness more evenly, by using the medium of technology to make sure that every child has access to the great teacher who inspires you to learn about whatever it might be. That would be really interesting, and then those teachers become leading personalities, not footballers or film actors but educators, because they have a digital online following. You want to be in that lesson, because it is with the teacher who does that fantastic stuff, whether it is about Shakespeare or microbiotics. That would be an amazing revolution. You have got rid of the friction of distance, and that talent and inspiration is available to all children. For me, that would be a very big win to free up knowledge and inspiration.

Margaret Mulholland: For me, it comes back to the inclusivity option. Look at the lessons that we are learning from hospital schools, for example, as well as special schools, where there is telepresence. A child can be in a hospital bed for six months and yet tune into a classroom and learn in an engaging and effective way. We should be taking those lessons from acute needs, putting them into mainstream contexts and saying what we can achieve from this.

Six years ago, I was still training teachers and was using examples of Wikis when I was telling them about young people with particularly complex needs. At the beginning of a session, I would talk about a young man with very complex learning difficulties, and the trainee teachers would tell me that they were quite frightened of working with that young person. They did not feel very good about saying that, but they were genuine and open and said, "This young person is not like anybody I have worked with or know. What would I do? How would I even start to teach this complex individual?"

We used Wikis as examples. This was six or seven years ago now. In four minutes of watching a Wiki, I could share a presentation of the key aspects of a young man's life with a teacher—who his family is, how he learns, what his strengths are, how he likes to interact, how he does not like doors banging and how he needs to be comfortable when he is sitting, if he is going to learn effectively. Those trainee teachers would say to me, "I feel like I can actually go and teach this child now", after four minutes.

We are still handing over dossiers on young people who are complicated learners to teachers who have no time and a huge workload, when we could be using platforms that have been tried, tested and developed, in school contexts. We need a really strong edtech strategy that enables us to achieve that. We need to champion what we are doing with complex young people and bring it into mainstream settings. It is just ahead of the curve. We can benefit from that kind of approach, and we can do it fairly rapidly, if we choose to.

In relation to the edtech strategy rolled out in response to the pandemic and the demonstrator schools, there has been peer learning among 11,000 schools—we need that strategy to be sustained and to use it creatively. From my point of view, we need to position innovative sectors—special and hospital schools and so on—to teach and develop others in communities of practice. That is a great opportunity for us to build on, given what Richard said about we how often suffer from rapid changes in strategy and new projects. We are not sustaining and building on what we have already developed, so the edtech strategy for having some lead schools in place is really important for us to build on.

James Turner: I was really struck by Richard’s point that technology can enable access to the most inspirational academics’ teaching and learning. If we can do that, not as a substitute for face-to-face teaching but as something complementary, we could free up more time in schools for a face-to-face, one-to-one focus on skills-building, employability and communication and social interaction, building on all those skills. We know from the research that those things particularly benefit low-income students in accessing job opportunities and helping them to navigate the labour market. Those things are often squeezed to the edges in state schools for very good reasons, but if we can free up more time for them, this will help to improve social mobility.

The Chair: That is a really important point.

Q121 **Baroness Benjamin:** I thank all our witnesses. This has been a really interesting session. I declare an interest: my daughter is a teacher and a head of geography, so she lives on a daily basis with many of the issues being discussed today. Margaret, to reassure you about some of the online harms issues that you mentioned, we will be debating the Online Harms Bill in the Lords soon to deal with some of the harm issues that you talked about, so we are on the case.

As well as recommendations, I have a question about lost time and how it can be addressed over time, especially after the statement made yesterday by Sir Kevan Collins regarding the pupil catch-up strategy. Some may say that, over the years, content-rich specification did not allow teachers time to develop skills and a love of learning within their students. This has been highlighted during the pandemic with the rollout of online and remote learning, where many children feel more disconnected and that they are lagging behind. My daughter says that, in the classroom, you are for ever asking the children to be quiet; online, you are begging them to say something.

We now have an opportunity to press the reset button and consult with teachers from all subjects and settings. In your opinion, should there be a reduction in content in order to make up time to develop skills that have been missed during the pandemic? Should there be an opportunity for kids to understand what—and, importantly, why—they are learning?

What should be done to make up for lost time and the skills and knowledge that children have missed out on over the lockdown? Should

adjustments be made to the national curriculum, not just for GCSE and A-level exams but to ensure that year groups that are moving up a skill stage are equipped with the skills and knowledge to cope with what they do over the next two to five years, without resorting to increasing workload and extra time for teachers and school staff? All in all, what steps should be taken now and when schools reopen to enable pupils to catch up and mitigate the long-term consequences that could last a lifetime?

Finally, what other recommendations would you like to see this committee make to government and others to address the negative long-term impact of this period of digital education and build on anything positive that has been learned before? There is lots to answer there. Natalie, you wanted to give some recommendations?

Natalie Perera: Going back to what I was saying earlier, on the issue of what the Government should do in relation to catch-up, I think there are three distinct options. First, as we have talked about, they could use some of the current interventions that they have, such as the pupil premium and the National Tutoring Programme, and turbo-charge them by adding more resources to them and accelerating their progress and reach.

The second set of options might be considered more radical and might require some changes to the school infrastructure: a longer school day; summer programmes that focus on academic and well-being support; and, for some pupils, possibly repeating the school or an academic year. The Government will consider those options, and in all of them there needs to be a focus on quality, because research shows that any positive impact that is derived must be born out of high-quality interventions.

The third bucket is the most interesting, in a way, because it gets to the heart of the problem. It is taking the opportunity now to address some of the root causes of inequality, thinking about policies such as how to address child poverty and policies on early intervention and the early years, focusing resources and effort on those areas in order to prevent the disadvantage gap from opening up in the first place. Those are the three options that we think should be on the table for the Government in thinking about catch up.

As you say, there is another distinct group of pupils that we need to pay special attention to: those transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education or from sixth form or FE into higher education or even the workplace. We have talked about what might replace exams this year and the need for clarity and fairness, but, for those pupils, there also needs to be a degree of consistency in how grades are allocated. The Government need to be clear about what they expect from schools when they allocate those grades.

Really importantly, there needs to be a statement of lost learning, or any gaps in learning, that accompanies pupils as they transition from one phase to another. If they cannot immediately catch up during the

summer term or potentially in the summer holidays, when they start in the autumn term, their new educator, whether that is a sixth-form or FE college or a university, needs to understand where the gaps in learning are for those pupils and address them as a matter of priority.

The importance of those knowledge gaps will vary depending on the subject: in something like maths, where the curriculum is cumulative and you need to know the core concepts in order to move on to some of the more difficult ones, learning loss is arguably more relevant and needs to be a higher priority.

However, at the same time, I do not think that we should be depriving pupils of learning or content in other subjects. In a subject such as English literature, pupils may have missed a Shakespeare play or 21st-century literature. You might consider that that is okay and that they can get by in life without learning that particular content, but, actually, we are still taking away some of the joy of learning. They are taking the curriculum for a reason—because it is, or ought to be, enjoyable to learn. As such, it is about balancing what we might consider essential to progress in life and in the next stage—university—but it is also about understanding that learning in itself should be enjoyable, and we should mitigate against pupils missing out as much as possible.

Margaret Mulholland: I suggest that we go back to the concept of leaders in schools and teachers knowing their pupils well. In terms of next steps, it is really important that funding is put into schools for schools to judge how and where they target resource, so that that catch-up concept can be tailored to those who need it most. We know that they do not fall into neat categories of pupil premium and SEND. There is a large proportion of young people who we have not discussed today, who may not have an education and healthcare plan and were not part of the requirement to be on site or prioritised, and they are young people who are on SEND support. A high proportion of those young people have been learning remotely, and in some instances have had access to learning support assistance but in many instances have not had additional resource. They may be the young people about whom a school says, “These are the young people we need to target first”. So we need that flexibility.

Another thing that we need to think about is revising strategic approaches to, for example, behaviour strategies. Zero tolerance, high expectations of silent corridors and so on are not things that will do young people good at the moment. We need to get back to oracy and a focus on communication. We know that these are core skills that lead to successful outcomes for young people. There needs to be a revisiting and leaders are ready for that, but they need that trust to be flexible in their approaches and to tailor support.

On pathways to employment, Natalie talked about post-16 and funding for that. We talk about resits of a year when we are thinking about A-levels, but what about those young people whose supported internships were disrupted during lockdown? What opportunities are there for them

to go back and revisit that? Sometimes these things are only a one-off opportunity from the local authority, and we need to readdress that and ensure that it is a focus.

Another thing that we need to capitalise on is the relationships that have been developed with parents. We need to ensure that parents continue to be collaborators in learning. That has been incredibly successful in many instances; a genuine co-production has been in place. We can ensure that that continues and that we invest in it further, and that we use online strategies to engage in social connectedness. Lots of teachers will tell you that they loved having online parents' evenings and that they will be sticking with them in future. There will be plenty of CPD opportunities in which we can invest. That additional support where we need it most must take the form of funding, in the first instance, as well as the capacity to target to need.

Baroness Benjamin: What about young children who have been excluded? Would online be a great way of capturing their attention, rather than allowing them to go off and get involved with gangs and things?

Margaret Mulholland: Referrals for exclusions are down at the moment, and alternative provision is therefore struggling with its place funding. That has been guaranteed for the next year, but not longer term. We need to address that quickly, so that we do not lose the resource that we have for good teachers in alternative provision. Alternative provision leaders tell us that they would really like the flexibility to use that hybrid model. They feel that it could be a valuable resource, but they want to focus on motivation and engagement. Any form of one-size-fits-all catch-up that is imposed or mandated will do a lot of damage to those young people.

We also do not want to see a spike of exclusions at return to school. That is another thing to think about and is why I mentioned that behaviour strategies are important. Exclusions could escalate, and we need to use flexibility in leadership there to target resource to support interventions that are in place quickly for young people, so that poor behaviours do not escalate.

Q122 **The Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt. It is just to remind Members, first, that we have just over five minutes left. I ask witnesses to keep answers as succinct as possible, but give us any recommendations that you would like to. I am interested to know if you can come up with specific things that you think the Government should focus on, so make your policy recommendations very clear for us. That would be immensely helpful.

James Turner: I will be brief. We absolutely think that this will have a huge impact on inequality and social mobility, so any plan that we come up with with a two-to-five-year view must be similarly ambitious. We think it needs to be targeted at those who have lost out most. There are ways in which you can do that through the pupil premium, as Natalie has already said. We are suggesting a boost to the pupil premium, which

would give schools more money to decide how best for their own pupils to catch up, whether through summer schools, extended school days or whatever is appropriate to their context.

There is also a role for central initiatives. We think that the National Tutoring Programme should become a fixture in the system, so that it can support schools, add capacity and get high-quality evidence-based tutoring to more of these students who have lost out. That is not a one-year endeavour; it is a two-to-five-year endeavour.

The other critical area, which Natalie has already referred to, is the post-16 space. A lot of the things that we have been talking about—the pupil premium and the National Tutoring Programme—end at 16. This group of students who have had their GCSEs disrupted and are now in further education are particularly hard done by in the pandemic. It is very important to make sure that more support is targeted at that group.

Richard Sheriff: I am an ex-head of geography, by the way. I have a few points. First, as policymakers, we have to decide what we want from the school system. What do you want? The school system is actually very pliable. If you say that these are specific targets based on outcomes at GCSE or A-level, the school system will align to do that. It will stop doing other stuff and do that. It does that particularly if you have a high-stakes accountability system, because unless it does that, senior people feel that they will lose their jobs. That is the reality, so you have to decide what you want.

If you want a fairer, more just, more sociable, more mentally healthy and more inclusive system, you have to put the incentives there and decide that, and frame it within the accountability system and how you hold it together. Rather than going to simple metrics, you need to look at the values that exist within it and state them clearly. It is really important that we make that clear to people.

Things like the National Tutoring Programme are brilliant but, as James said, they need to be there for much longer and to be an option that schools can choose. The increase in pupil premium funding, giving schools the choice to make decisions in the locality for their children, is definitely the best way forward. National programmes that have a blanket approach are likely to be wasted resources and also introduce a middle layer where finance can get lost. Let us get it where it needs to be and hold schools to account in an appropriate way. That will make such a difference.

We need to build back trust, as well as education and learning lost. A lot of trust has been lost as a society, in each other, in the systems and in what we do. We need to do that, and we have to deal with the issue of poverty, because it prevents progress too. We have to align this with our strategy on poverty. If you get people out of poverty, you give them hope. If you are hopeful, you go to school. If you are not hopeful and you are in poverty, you do not go to school. It does not matter how good it is,

you just do not go, because what is the point? We need to deal with poverty alongside education.

To come back to the curriculum question, what Natalie said was interesting: it ought to be enjoyable. I have to declare that Jane Austen was never enjoyable to me, but it was a diet that was forced on me in A-level English. Other books I loved, but I did not like Jane Austen—no offence. We need to make sure that we do not take the curriculum we had before and say, "That will be appropriate in the future". We need to make sure that it adjusts and aligns with what children are doing now and with their aspirations, their career intentions and so forth. Some of the things that we still value are not perhaps as valuable as we thought they were. I know that is an awful thing to say, but we need to take a hard look at the content of the curriculum and think about what we value and want to be in there. What about the arts, what about sport, what about the things that give us joy?

During this pandemic, I think we have all learned to value friends, family, happiness and mental well-being much more. Those are the things that we have come to realise are incredibly fragile and that we need to build into our school system and show that we value by the way we hold schools to account. That would be a true revolution and one that would give us a much happier and more coherent nation, whoever you are and whatever your disability. Let us focus on the joy in the education system, because that is what has been missing. It is not just about filling empty vessels with knowledge.

Baroness Benjamin: How about optimism?

Richard Sheriff: Always, absolutely. That is one of the things that I have been talking and writing about recently. That is why I like the term "the remarkable" to describe these children, rather than "the Covid generation". Let us talk about what they can do. Let us talk about the experience they have had. Let us compare them with the post-war refugees returning and the boom that happened after the First World War period from the innovation that was forced upon us by conflict. Let us use this innovation and this period to relaunch and to give them a much better, more optimistic future.

There is huge optimism here, and we need to give it to children in our most deprived communities, who have sometimes lost all sight of that. Sorry, I have gone there. My apologies.

Baroness Benjamin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you. What a fabulously interesting session, with so much depth and complexity. I have been struck again and again by the intersectional nature of a lot of the things that you have talked about. I have written down in capital letters something that Richard said: "Spread the goodness". I thought that was a fantastically optimistic way of expressing something that is potentially not optimistic at all at the minute. I hope we can carry that through into some of our work. We are

all very keen to present effective solutions and policies and things that government can really act on. Thank you all very much for your time. I very much appreciate you giving it up. I know that everyone in this area is immensely busy at the moment, for obvious reasons. I now draw this session formally to a close.