HOUSE OF LORDS

Numeracy for Life Committee

Corrected oral evidence

Thursday 19 March 2026

10.50 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Agnew of Oulton (The Chair); Baroness Alexander of Cleveden; Lord Blackwell; Baroness Bull; Baroness Garden of Frognal; Lord Hampton; Baroness Hamwee; Lord Hannett of Everton; Lord Massey of Hampstead; Baroness Spielman; Viscount Stansgate; Lord Stevenson of Balmacara.

Evidence Session No. 3 Heard in Public Questions 33 - 46

Witnesses

I: Dr Sue Pember CBE, Policy Advisor, HOLEX; Alex Stevenson, Deputy Director, Learning and Work Institute; Marguerite Hogg, Senior Policy Manager, Association of Colleges; Dipa Ganguli OBE, CEO and Principal, WM College.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Sue Pember, Alex Stevenson, Marguerite Hogg and Dipa Ganguli.

Q33 **The Chair:** Good morning, everybody. A big welcome to our guest witnesses today. Thank you for agreeing to come and speak to us. This session is an important one because we are focusing very much on adult education in maths and numeracy; you all have important roles to play in that. There are four of you. We want to hear from each of you for each question, but we ask that you are concise in your answers. If you simply agree with somebody else, that is fine, but I am also interested in disagreements because we get to the heart of these issues better through what I call the crucible of debate.

I will open the batting with our first question. We are aware that over half of adults are challenged in their numeracy skills—we do not have a precise number, but it could be in the order of 10 million adults in Britain—so we want to learn more about what provision there is for adults. If they have not succeeded in maths at school, what is available, and how effective are the mechanisms that are out there?

Dr Sue Pember: Good morning, everybody. Thanks for inviting us. All four of us are quite excited, I think, because you are asking us to talk about our favourite subject.

First, what we have at the moment is much less than what we had 10 or 15 years ago—in fact, about half the number. In 2007, we had 700,000 adults participating in maths. Now, we have 240,000. That is the first number.

Secondly, on how many people have poor maths, is it probably around 16 million, depending on how you count it. Some 8 million of those have very poor maths—fewer skills than you would expect of a nine year-old.

The Chair: Sorry—how many do you think are at the level of a nine year-old?

Dr Sue Pember: It is between 8 million and 9 million; we have statistics to back that up. We have a real problem in this country.

It is not all bad news, though. We have courses and programmes on offer at every level, from what we call entry level 1 to level 1, level 2 and GCSE. Some adults also go on to do the equivalent of an A-level or an HND programme.

We have all of that happening, but it is really hit and miss. You can be in one part of the country and have a really good progression route—you could start in family learning then move on to a centre like Dipa's and go on to a college to do your GCSE—but, in other parts of the country, you have nothing. That is one of our major problems. The teachers we do

have are absolutely brilliant. I know that you have a question on Multiply, which I am sure we would like to talk about, because we learned from it that we have absolutely fantastic teachers out there—we just do not have enough of them.

Dipa Ganguli: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. I am the principal of WM College, which is the oldest adult college in the country. In my college, we have around 300 learners doing maths provision, of whom 40% have declared that they have a learning difficulty or a disability. We start from entry level 1, which is where people do not know numbers up to 20 or basic mathematical operations. We work with them all the way through to GCSE. What we work on is not really developing their skills but breaking down the barriers and creating confidence so that they can learn maths; it is about changing the narrative of, "I can't do maths. I've never been good at maths".

The Chair: What is the track record of that cohort of 300 over the past few years? How many are you getting over the line to a level of functional numeracy?

Dipa Ganguli: Somebody who starts at entry level 1 typically takes four or five years to get to functional skills level 2. However, we know that a lot of them will not get there because they have some form of learning difficulty or disability; the most they can hope to attain is level 1, which is equivalent to the age of 11 in school. However, I am really proud that, of those who go on to do functional skills level 2 and GCSE in my college, a very high percentage go on to get a grade 4 or above.

Marguerite Hogg: I represent the Association of Colleges—the AoC—which represents FE colleges in England. In our colleges, we currently deliver around three-quarters of post-16 maths—this includes functional skills and 95% of GCSE resits—and a third of A-level entries in core maths. As well as that, there are, obviously, the basic numeracy programmes through tailored learning within the adult skills fund.

Tailored learning is really important for adult numeracy. GCSE resits and functional skills are great to aspire to for learners, but, often, as Dipa said, they are not ready for that; they may have had a poor experience at school during their first time round in education. Tailored learning provides a more nuanced approach to numeracy skills. It is more supportive and enables them to build confidence and stepping stones towards further progress. It is not measured on outcomes in terms of employment; that can be one of the outcomes, but there are lots of other outcomes that can be evidenced, such as physical health, mental health and supporting your children with their learning. This is why it is a valuable opportunity for learners to progress through that and into other types of qualification.

Alex Stevenson: Good morning, everybody. I am a deputy director at the Learning and Work Institute, which is an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work. Like

many of my colleagues on the panel, we are concerned that too many people are at risk of being left behind by low numeracy skills; and that, as Sue outlined, the number of people participating in adult numeracy learning is in decline.

Let me add a couple of figures to the ones Sue mentioned. One of the particular points of concern is that the OECD's survey of adult skills, which was carried out in 2023 and published in December 2024, showed that 21% of adults scored at level 1 or below for numeracy. Although our performance in the survey of adult skills for numeracy generally improved, that improvement was driven by the people scoring the most highly in the PIAAC assessments, while the skills levels of the lowest achievers remained unchanged since the previous OECD survey more than a decade ago.

We are really concerned that there is not enough focus in policy on addressing that disadvantage, which is why we are concerned about the decline in participation that Sue mentioned. It is particularly concerning that those participation numbers have not bounced back since Covid. You would expect to see that there was an impact during that period, but we are still below that—we have not got back to business as usual.

We are also concerned about some of the specific measures that we have seen recently in skills policy. We have seen further reductions in investment through the adult skills fund, and we have seen changes to the English and maths rules for adult apprenticeships: in-year, this year, it looks as though there is something like a 14% reduction in participation in English and maths learning. We are concerned that we do not have the policy focus that we need to turn this around. By our calculations, at the current rate of progress, it will take something like 25 to 30 years to get all of the people with low numeracy skills up to the functional level you mentioned.

The Chair: So we are doing well on A-level participation but poorly on level 1 participation.

Alex Stevenson: Yes. It is below level 1: fundamental, everyday numeracy skills.

Lord Massey of Hampstead: What is the reason for the low participation? Is it a resource thing? Is demand reducing somehow? What drives it?

Dr Sue Pember: We know—we will come on to talking about Multiply—that the demand is there but the resource is not. The budget has been cut by more than 40%. To get back to the money that was going in in 2012, before the austerity measures, we would need £5 billion over a period of 10 years. It is all down to investment. We learned—again, through Multiply—that we can increase the offer really quickly, and we know that there are adults out there. However, without the resource, we are stymied; we cannot do anything.

The Chair: That leads us neatly on to the next question, which is about Multiply. There are several bits to this, so we will split the question between Baroness Hamwee and Baroness Spielman.

Baroness Hamwee: I will be disobedient and ask you a very quick follow-up, if I may; I am probably directing this at you, Dipa. What is the retention rate? Do you have a lot of people dropping out, or do you manage to hang on to them?

Dipa Ganguli: We manage to hang on to them because of the wraparound support we provide, but that comes at a cost. They need support with childcare and travel, as well as additional learning support in the classroom. The more support we provide to those who stay, the less we can meet the demand, because it is a finite pot.

Q34 **Baroness Hamwee:** Sue, you said that you have learned from Multiply; you have mentioned a couple of things already. Can we talk about the content of it? Is there enough similar provision now that Multiply has finished? What informal schemes can be implemented to engage adults who would not otherwise engage? Generally, how should we respond to the end of Multiply?

Dr Sue Pember: There is quite a bit in that question; I will probably share it with Marguerite. The AoC ran a fantastic development programme for the length of Multiply and put together a big resource bank at the end of that programme that covers many of the questions you have just asked. We have recorded what worked—that is the first thing.

What worked was that this fund, and the way it was managed through the DfE, gave practitioners and teachers freedom to do what was right for the student. That is the first time we have had that in 20 years, probably, because everything else has been so restricted to a curriculum. That is not to say that they did not write a curriculum and did not have lesson plans and all that goes around it; however, it allowed practitioners and their managers to react to what students wanted.

What did we learn? We knew these things but probably had not been doing them. We learned that the students like maths if it is brought to them in the right way. When I say that, I mean it has to be relevant to their work, their children and their life, and it has to be fun. That relevance is incredibly important. People up and down the country, for example in Hull and Leeds, were really creative. In Leeds, they got a bus and went into the villages. York had the best activities I have seen, with a lot of CPD and teachers getting engaged and going well above what they needed to do.

As Dipa hinted, the wraparound is so important. What entices them in in the first instance can be really creative. It might be as simple as this: "Bake Off" is on the telly; how do we do the maths to cook? Many may think that that is a bit frivolous, but it is not to some people, and then it

fits to healthy eating and all those other agendas we are trying to address.

With the assessment, the whole thing was that it would be assessed, and the target was to get people to progress. That is what happened.

However, the legacy is poor because, somehow, when this Government came in, they closed it, quite sharply. The concept was that the tailored learning budget or the adult skills budget could pick all this up, but it has been cut by 40%. If you pick up the Multiply stuff, then employability, healthy living or learning a skill might have to go. There were too many trade-offs. We have seen that maths is continuing but not at the level of Multiply.

Baroness Hamwee: Presumably, the cut in budget means that you have lost staff as well, in numbers.

Dr Sue Pember: Yes, but we are very short of maths staff, so all of us on this table were saying "Do not lose them" to colleges and providers—if you have people retiring, make sure that you infill them. You can see I am quite passionate about Multiply—I really enjoyed it. What was wonderful was that we encouraged or collected—or, I do not know, poached—schoolteachers. Both of us have met some teachers who came from primary school. A year or two before Multiply, we might have been a bit like, "Oh, they will not suit FE". They were absolutely fantastic. I now need to stop—go on.

Marguerite Hogg: I have some data, if that is helpful. Sue is right: the AoC, in partnership with HOLEX, ran the Multiply capability support programme on behalf of the Department for Education. It was an eye-opener for me. I will admit that I suffer from maths anxiety as well, so I can completely understand how adults will feel coming into this. I asked one of our partner organisations to run some data for me last week. It shows that, in the 2024-25 academic year, there were approximately 4,800 enrolments in colleges in tailored learning numeracy programmes and 23,000 enrolments on Multiply. In the current academic year, tailored learning numeracy programme enrolments are approximately 4,700, and there is no Multiply. That leaves potentially another 23,000 adults who need numeracy skills but who we are not helping at the moment. We are part-way through the year. The academic year has not finished, so that data might not be complete, but it looks like there is a massive gap there.

I absolutely echo what Sue said about the innovation and the freedoms and the flexibilities. There was a bus in East Yorkshire that was travelling around local communities and taking numeracy out to villages—a little bit like the library buses that I remember from my childhood growing up in rural North Yorkshire. We had numeracy festivals, which were bringing in local celebrities as numeracy ambassadors to hype it up. In the actual content and the classes, there was the freedom to do activities like cooking on a budget and crafting.

In terms of bringing potential learners in to participate, incentives were also fundable. I am saying it on behalf of colleges, but they were able to buy air fryers and do a cooking in an air fryer course. You would do a course, learn about volumes and measures, and then at the end of it, you would get an air fryer that you could take home and do it yourself. Shopping vouchers were another incentive.

I believe there was some discussion about darts in last week's session. We know that in one of the multiplier classes that were going on, at break time they had a social area with dartboards. So we said, "Go and relax, have a game of darts". We called it maths by stealth. It is numeracy and maths by stealth; you have given it to them, but they do not realise that is what they are getting.

Baroness Hamwee: Perhaps we had better hand over to Amanda and the other two can come in with thoughts on that as well.

Q35 **Baroness Spielman:** You have pretty much covered the domain of question 2, but I want to ask a related question. In this range of courses under Multiply that you have been talking about, which aspects of numeracy do you think have been most effectively taught with relatively high success rates, and which have proved particularly intractably difficult to teach?

Dipa Ganguli: My background is as a maths teacher; I taught entry 3 all the way to GCSE. We ran a very successful Multiply programme on healthy eating, and within that we taught budgeting, ratios, money handling, weight measures, and proportions. We did another course, which was tailoring. Marguerite said about air fryers; we actually gave them sewing machines. They were pattern cutting—that is geometry. If we had actually said we were going to teach them geometry, they would have said, "Oh God, no, I do not do it". But because they were doing pattern cutting, they knew how to measure and cut.

Baroness Spielman: You talked about a number of mathematical domains there. In which of those do you think students acquired transferable knowledge that they might be able to use in another context, and which were hardest in practice?

Dipa Ganguli: I think, certainly, numbers. They could do numbers and budgeting. For instance, when they went out and bought their groceries, they had to ask if "buy one, get one half price" was cheaper than buying 500g of something. They were doing the calculations, so that is something they can take into their daily lives.

What has not been successful is algebra. We did not even attempt to do algebra in there, because even I struggled to see how algebra can fit into my everyday life. There were aspects of percentages where, if they were buying something, they knew to ask if it was cheaper if it was 20% off or half price. They were comparing percentages and decimals, and that kind of foundational knowledge really helped them. Many of them, at least in

my college, progressed on to mainstream maths after the Multiply programme.

Alex Stevenson: Can I come in on Multiply as well? it is really important that we learn the lessons from this programme, including what has worked well and what has not. We look forward to the programme evaluation being published, along with the results of the randomised controlled trials that ran alongside it. We were involved in a couple of those; they will, I hope, help us understand more about which features of provision are effective. We should be doing a bit more of that across this space.

On Multiply, it is helpful to think about where it sits in the context of the wider offer to adults. This partly links back to the question about engagement. I agree with the point about investment, but there is something about the shape of the offer. Until Multiply, it was quite narrow, really: you can do a functional skills qualification, which is now nearly 10 years old, out of date and probably in need of revision, or you can do a GCSE, which is important and useful for some people. But, until Multiply, we did not have much in that flexible, tailored engagement space; that is really important in getting people to take their first steps back into learning numeracy and learning more generally.

We were involved in evaluating the Multiply programme commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority. It focused in particular on supporting people who were in work, but it also focused on financial literacy in the community. We certainly saw that some of those topics were really helpful in developing learners' transferable arithmetic and basic maths skills; they reported this in the evaluation. More broadly, though, we saw improvements in their attitude to learning and their awareness of what adult learning might do for them, as well as increased confidence and skills in numeracy. Some of the outcomes included progression into further education and training—not just adult skills fund numeracy provision but other adult education, including technical and vocational qualifications as well.

The key success factors that we found in the Multiply programme were around flexible and tailored delivery, responding to people's interests and needs, and around having providers who were able to use the programme to create in community settings safe spaces for delivery where people did not feel judged for coming forward for help with numeracy and maths.

One thing we have not mentioned yet is that providers were able both to form strong partnerships with voluntary sector organisations and to use those relationships to bring people in and engage them in numeracy learning. Those are some of the things that I think are important to learn from the Multiply programme; we should try to mainstream some of them into the delivery of the adult skills fund.

Q36 **Lord Massey of Hampstead:** What would you say should be the next

steps on tailored learning, which seems to be working very well? That is under the adult skills fund. What should we do next to promote that after Multiply has ended?

Dr Sue Pember: The first thing to say is that the £210 million in the tailored learning fund has been static since 2009. It has never been increased; you could say that it has never been reduced, but it has never been increased. It has not even gone up with inflation. A few years ago, the Government changed it from adult community learning into what we now call tailored learning, and they attached some specific objectives and outcomes to it.

You are absolutely right that it is working really well. Although it is generating a lot more data and people have to record much more, we can now see where the money is going. It is ripe for expansion. Although we might not want a specific programme called Multiply to start and end it, the most appropriate things would be to expand and put more money into the ACL and the tailored learning budget and to make sure that adult maths is seen as a priority in every area.

At the moment, we have LSIPs—local skills improvement plans—all around the country, but, when the DfE wrote its first spec for chambers to come together with employers to write those plans, adult maths did not appear in there. It was not a priority. I still do not think that it is a priority—in fact, I meant to check this before I came here today—even though many people in that area are going to need it. What was written up was level 3 and above. We need this to be a priority in every planning system we have, and we need the fund to go up. I am sure that other people would say the same. We are all into making the pound go as far as we can make it go, but we have taken it as far as we can.

Lord Massey of Hampstead: On the drop in the budget, you mentioned 40%, I think. Obviously, there has been a massive drop in the participation rate. Is the loss of budget related to teachers' pay and financing wages, or are there other aspects to the budget drop?

Dr Sue Pember: It was so much. If you map it, we are still in the adult ed world of 10,000 centres. That sounds like a lot, but a centre could be a training room that Tesco has given a learning organisation for free. We have 10,000 of them now, but there were many more before and they were open for longer hours. So that drop in the adult skills budget has affected every bit of the operation, from what you can pay your staff and how you train your staff to whether you are looking for qualified staff and whether you have centres. Many centres have closed and, because of cuts, local authorities can no longer situate people in libraries and adult ed centres and pull them together, because the library may be shut. Every aspect of this has been affected.

The biggest thing for me is: how do adults learn with all these barriers in front of them? How do they travel there? If they have an LLD issue,

where do they get their support from? As I say, it has had an effect on every part of the teaching programme.

Marguerite Hogg: I do not think that it is just about the teaching. Dipa will be able to tell you more about this than I can, but, whenever I talk to colleges that deliver adult learning, they mention wraparound support. When an adult comes into college to get a qualification or undertake a course, there are all the other things that Sue mentioned, such as travel and childcare. I know that we will probably come on to this in a later question, but all of those barriers have to be overcome, and there is generally a financial cost to some of that. Then you have estates trying to find space for learners, which comes with a cost, and those costs have gone up with inflation.

Lord Massey of Hampstead: Does that potentially explain the decline in participation rates? With the cost of living, people cannot find the time or the extra money to spend.

Marguerite Hogg: Those are other barriers, yes.

Alex Stevenson: The other way in which it feeds into the drop-off in participation is around provider capacity. Through the Multiply programme, we saw that having the time and resources to link up with other organisations outside of providers can be really helpful. A few years ago, when we researched effective practice in adult English and maths for the Greater London Authority, this was one of the things that providers told us about. Because of the constant squeeze on resources and having to do more with less, they no longer had the capacity to do that bit around networking, partnerships and relationships.

For subjects such as adult numeracy and other essential skills, learners do not always walk in through the door. You have to go out, find them and recruit them, so you need a bit of capacity to do that as well. This is why we have seen those participation numbers drop, I think, as well as the decline in underpinning investment.

Lord Massey of Hampstead: I was going to ask whether you proactively find learners. So you do actually go out and look for them?

Alex Stevenson: Yes.

Q37 **Baroness Garden of Frognal:** You have partly answered my question, which is about the key barriers, because you have mentioned things such as childcare, transport and time off work, but how much of a deterrent is basic maths anxiety, in terms of the mindset of being able to do maths? I was the one who talked about darts when I had an absolutely impossible class in front of me. I saw a dartboard, and they all played darts; they were way ahead of me. We only went up to the three times table, but three times 18 is quite challenging. If you can overcome that barrier and affix maths to something practical, people will be interested. It makes it fun; I am a great champion of fun. How do you think we can overcome

these barriers?

Dipa Ganguli: When we see our learners, I would put the barriers into three categories. There are dispositional barriers, which include confidence and maths anxiety; I will come on to those. The barriers could be situational, around work or childcare. Then there are institutional barriers as well.

On maths anxiety, it is a fear. We see it very often when people are asked to do a maths task. It could be in the moment, when you ask them to do something, or it could be long-standing, which may hamper their progress. They come with a mindset of, "I'm no good at maths". After years of going through the school system, they come out and say, "Actually, I can't do this". I have had this in my class where, if I used to tell them, "Okay, next week we are doing fractions", they would say, "Oh Dipa, I've never understood fractions. I'm not coming to class". So you have to coax them into it and make it relevant: it has to relate to them.

I will just give you a very quick experience I had. I was teaching percentages, and there was this young girl in my class. Part-way through the class, she ran out in floods of tears. I thought, "God, I didn't think the class was that bad". Anyway, I followed behind her. She was in her mid-20s, and she said that from the time she was 19 she had worked at a travel agency, and that evening was the first time she had worked out how her commission was given to her. So it was a feeling of empowerment. She actually felt empowered: "Actually, I've got control of my own life". So it is about making it relevant to them, so that they feel that they are getting something out of it.

I have talked about institutional issues, and we find that it is about the language of maths as well. We have a whole range of learners for whom English is not their first language. Mathematically they may be very able, but for them to solve a problem, a multlayered, multiclausal problem, it is actually about English comprehension. I wrote down two examples. This is from a level 1 functional skills paper: "Take a fair sample in whichever way you feel is fairest and explain". The other one says: "Construct a visual representation"—instead of just saying "Draw a graph". So students are having to understand the English before they can solve the problem, and we are testing them on this. Finally, the language of assessment is often inaccessible, and that is what they are struggling with. So it is about making it relevant, providing them with the support they need so that they can come in, and then finally allowing them to then pass the exam.

Marguerite Hogg: I add that it is about learning how to learn again as well. If you come back into education as an adult, you might have been out of it for a very short time, but you might have been out of it for quite a long time, so it is about learning how to learn again. Also, as Dipa said, if you lack literacy and digital skills, they support that learning process, so there is that issue as well.

On data again, if you are interested, we looked at differences in who was accessing numeracy as an adult. The 2024-25 data shows that 67% of adult numeracy-related enrolments were from women, but that means that there is potentially a concern around men's engagement, or perhaps men do not need that support. Maybe there is some work to do around digging behind that data. The data also showed that 37% of numeracy skills learners in colleges are under the age of 30; many of these will be on GCSE resits. In the 30 to 39 age group there are 28%, in 40 to 49 it is 22%, but then it drops off a cliff: the 50 to 59 age group is 9%, and for over-60s it is 3%. At a time when we are encouraging people to work for longer, we need to be able to ensure that adults have the skills, including numeracy skills, for them to be able to do that.

Obviously, funding is a major barrier in terms of the system level. Over the last 15 years, we have not seen any change in funding, as we have said before, and that is a system barrier to colleges and adult learning providers being able to put that on.

Q38 **Lord Hannett of Everton:** I am particularly interested in the motivation for learning, particularly with adults in terms of coming back. I was very involved in lifelong learning when funding was available, and many employees in some of the biggest companies for the first time saw education in a different way, although some of the courses would be very parochial to them—it would be a particular subject. Do you have much involvement with that programme? It would be interesting to know whether that was a good thing that should have possibly continued.

Dr Sue Pember: Absolutely. We talk about barriers for learners, but one of the ways you can overcome barriers is by somebody saying to them, "You need to do this". The employer's role, the supervisor's role or the Unionlearn role there was incredibly important in influencing people. You can do everything that we described, but the person still does not go. What has been more successful in the employment-led courses is when the employer has taken a lead: "If you want to get promoted, you need to improve your skills"—that sounds like a strong message—or Jobcentre Plus might say, "You are never going to get a job; we want you to go on a maths course". Around 2005, we even threatened to sanction people through Jobcentre Plus if they did not do a maths course.

So, on the one hand, we want to remove barriers, but on the other hand we also need some sort of—it is not an incentive, is it? It is almost a stick to make people do things. Going back a little bit with Multiply, we saw that as well. One of the best strands was with housing associations, which worked with their adult ed partner to give support on how not to get into debt: "We're warning you. You're six months behind. We want you to go on one of these courses". The feedback from that was that the people who went realised what they were doing. So there are different ways of looking at that, but the employer has to play a part here.

We are saddened about the demise of Investors in People, which was a great lever. The other part of this is that we see, as Alex has just said,

that going back 10 or 15 years ago, every bit of government played its part in encouraging somebody to do maths. The contracts with employers, with the contractors, would say, "Not only do you have to train people, you must train people in basic skills". Jobcentre Plus sanctions signposted people, as did jobcentres. We used every bit: wherever government touched the individual or the employer, we used that to help us get people in.

The thing that is even more saddening is that, up until last year, for adult apprentices, maths and English were part of their programme. Now they can choose, which means they are closing the door to apprentices for ever as regards going on to a level 3, because they are never going to get their level 2 maths. Maybe I am being controversial, but none of us knows why that decision was taken. We have already, this September, seen a huge drop in apprentices choosing to do maths, not because they might not want to do it, but maybe because their employer is not encouraging them as that means they are going to stay put, they are not going to get promoted and they will not go off to another employer—whatever that motive is. Maybe I am being a bit cynical there. However, they have shut the door to those people progressing.

Alex Stevenson: I recognise those barriers that we were talking about and those that are specific to maths as well, such as maths anxiety. But I agree very much with what Sue has been saying. Almost every year we run an adult participation in learning survey, which confirms that many people face barriers to participating in learning. But the thing that jumps out every year at me is that around 30% say that they do not have any barriers, and nothing is preventing them learning, but they do not want to do it or they do not see how it is relevant to them. We need to look at the broader motivational picture and think about how we engage people, encourage them to take part and see some learning—whether it is in maths or another subject—as something that can bring real, tangible benefits to them. There needs to be a broader awareness of that.

In our survey in 2021, we looked at adults' awareness of that entitlement to fully funded English and maths provision up to level 2, and only two in five adults know that you can get a free course to help with your maths. Even worse, if you look at those who were less likely to be aware of the support, they were people who had left school earlier, those with lower levels of qualifications and those who had not participated in any learning at all recently. So, all the people who you would want to know about this help are less likely to know about it.

That is why it is important to think about how we sell this to adults and, yes, hook them in where that is appropriate, whether that is within apprenticeships, when they access vocational training or in the workplace. These are really important and meaningful contexts where people can be engaged in learning. We work closely with the British Army, including on adult numeracy and literacy provision. Achieving a

certain level of numeracy and literacy skills is an absolute prerequisite for promotion through the ranks, and that creates a really strong incentive.

We should look beyond those contexts as well. I agree that housing is important, but there are also opportunities within other public services and from looking into the community. What is the role of libraries in supporting and engaging people? Can we also do more through health services, by looking at things such as social prescribing into learning opportunities?

Q39 **Lord Blackwell:** From listening to Dipa and Marguerite just now, the fact that you are finding methods of getting adults to overcome their barriers and improve their numeracy suggests that those individuals might well have been able to do that at an earlier age, when they were at school, and that you have to deal with the remedial consequences of that. Are there lessons from the way that you are approaching this with adults that could and should be applied to school teaching, and have those lessons been learned?

Dipa Ganguli: One of the first things that I learned when I trained to be a teacher—I have always taught in adult learning—is that, when teaching an adult maths, you have to teach in the way they learn rather than in your preferred style of teaching. You have to take the learner's starting point, then take them on that journey. We all have a preferred way of teaching; however, that does not work for adults. It is about making sure you break down that barrier. It is almost maths by stealth without the stigma; "Let's do it; let's make it relevant to you".

For instance, even with GCSEs, I would not introduce algebra until much later, because I could not contextualise it to their everyday lives. That is really important: as soon as they realise they can actually use this in their everyday lives, they start to enjoy it and take pride in it, but that is not necessarily the way that maths is taught in schools.

Viscount Stansgate: Welcome to all of you. Before I ask my question: forgive me, Dr Pember, I have been wondering what the acronym HOLEX stands for, so do tell us.

Dr Sue Pember: This is a bit of a history lesson, but I will do it very quickly. Does anybody remember the 1992 education Act? It gave colleges the freedom to be incorporated institutions. When that Act came into force, it left behind adult centres in local authorities. So what does HOLEX stand for? It stands for "heads of learning in external institutions". Although they were part of local authorities, they were branded as external institutions.

So it has a real meaning. If you are a head of service like Dipa, we will give you the support you need. The organisation became HOLEX in 1992, but it has been around since before then, so it has a decent history to it.

Viscount Stansgate: Thank you very much indeed, because I may not be the only member of this committee who was wondering that.

Dr Sue Pember: I could say we are a secret society, really, because that is how we like to behave.

Q40 **Viscount Stansgate:** Well, thanks for revealing yourselves. As we are talking about barriers, what I want to explore is whether there are any particular groups of people who, in your view, are less likely to engage with adult learning. If so, how do you identify them and why do you think certain groups may not be as susceptible to, amenable to or interested in numeracy for life?

Dr Sue Pember: The main group is those who were failed by the school system. They are the ones who really had no chance of getting a GCSE but were put through the national curriculum. I have been a school governor for many years, so I know head teachers who will tell you that, when youngsters come to them at 11, they know which ones will fail their GCSEs, but they are still put through that curriculum. Therefore, even before they are the age of 11, probably by the age of nine, you will be able to tell which ones will, in adulthood, say "I can't do maths. I hated school. I can't bear it. I can't think about it".

They are a large part of this population. Although we are talking about individuals here, many of us care about the country's productivity level. These people, who have been failed by us, are now in the workplace and are struggling. They are the ones who are less likely to put themselves forward, which is why Alex and I were talking about having levers to get them into doing something.

Alex Stevenson: I agree with Sue on that point about people leaving school. You can look at some of the variables that are associated with low numeracy; there is quite a wide range of stuff there. Some of our analysts have been crunching numbers from the OECD data recently in trying to work out whether you can predict what it means about how many people have low numeracy skills in a local area. It is quite difficult to do because, while all of that is correct, there is also a sense that numeracy skills cut across. There are people from very different backgrounds who may have a specific need for support with numeracy, as well as being disadvantaged in more familiar ways.

When we tried to model the extent of literacy and numeracy in local areas, we found that, while you get areas that have pockets of high need for essential skills, there is a backdrop of essential skills needs everywhere, as well. This is why it is important to have a sort of universal offer. You may have somebody who is otherwise quite highly qualified, who is in employment and who does not have some of those risk factors, but who nevertheless could benefit from support with numeracy to make them more productive and effective in the workplace.

It is really important that there is that broad offer there and that provision is not narrowly restricted on the basis of whether people already have a level 2 qualification or something like that. If people have

identified that they would benefit from help with maths and numeracy, there should be a funded option for them.

Dipa Ganguli: It is very much about their motivation and why they want to do it. A lot of the time we find that learners will come because they want to help their children. Suddenly, they now have an impetus to learn maths: they want to be the parent who can support their child, they may need it for their work, they may need it for health reasons—because they want to know how to dispense their medication—or they may want to become independent travellers who can read bus and train timetables, which they have not been able to.

I think the barrier we put in their way is then to say, "You need to do an exam". If they could just come to college and learn maths for their use, we would have a lot more people participating. This is exactly the reason that Multiply was a success: they were not forced to take a qualification at the end. That is where maths anxiety can come in, because they have never been able to take an exam because they do not believe that they are good at maths.

Marguerite Hogg: To add to that, adult numeracy is key in cutting across that cross-government challenge, for work and better employment opportunities, as we said before, and to address everyday life challenges in the cost of living crisis—such as managing the household budget, understanding payslips and pensions, eating healthily and cooking healthy meals for your family, supporting children with homework, as we have already said, and supporting health outcomes. There was an example that one of the providers had put on Multiply about managing diabetes and measuring and understanding blood sugar levels. This is particularly relevant at the moment with the three shifts in the 10-year health plan that we are waiting for, so it absolutely cuts across all the challenges that the Government face.

Viscount Stansgate: One of you mentioned socioeconomic background. Are there any other ways, such as ethnic breakdowns, that show certain groups who are more likely to take part or not?

Marguerite Hogg: I have data on that, but do not have it to hand. I can provide it afterwards.

Viscount Stansgate: I am sure it would be very helpful, if you are able to.

Marguerite Hogg: Yes, absolutely. We know that the majority of enrolments, certainly in colleges, are from white British or white Irish nationals. I believe that learners of a Pakistani background are the next, but I would have to go back and get the data so you can have a complete breakdown of that.

Baroness Bull: On that last point, if you could provide data across other protected characteristics, as it would be good to know whether there was

a gender divide too, it would be really helpful.

Marguerite Hogg: Yes, I can do that.

Baroness Bull: You have done that brilliant thing of answering in advance the question that is coming next. I am very grateful that you have talked about the motivations for people to engage

Q41 **Baroness Bull:** You have done that brilliant thing of answering in advance the question that is coming next. I am very grateful that you have talked really well on the motivations for people to engage; I am glad that you have stressed and picked out managing health, for instance, because these things are often ignored. So—rather than asking the question that is written here, because I think you have answered it—I want to pick up on a couple of issues. Maybe make these answers relatively crisp because I know that other colleagues want to come in.

First, you talked a bit about the role of the third sector and other partnerships—you talked about the Army, for instance—and I am keen that we understand fully the ecology and network of who might be intermediaries with different communities. Perhaps you could pick up that.

Secondly, on the removal of the requirement for apprentices to study GCSE maths, I am pretty sure that GCSE maths is probably not the thing they should be studying, but the drop in studying is interesting. A Learning and Work Institute report, I think in 2024, showed that there were 914,000 jobs with numeracy requirements that were unfilled, and, as I understand it, last year there were 110,000 people studying maths. That is a huge difference. I do not know whether we can pick up on what we might do to bridge that gap. Sue mentioned productivity; that is the big challenge, and I cannot help thinking that this lack of numeracy skills is linked. So there is a basket of questions there, but please be crisp because I know others want to come in.

Alex Stevenson: I will jump in first. The point about intermediaries is important, given what we have said about the barriers and people needing that support. They can be champions in the community, trusted organisations or learning providers working in partnership with those trusted places, meeting people where they are. That applies to the workplace as well. Something that international evidence suggests is really important in driving up employer investment in skills and getting employers to do more on training in the workplace—we know that employer investment in training has fallen by 30% per employee since 2011, which lags behind the levels of investment seen in European countries—is the role of trusted intermediaries in workplaces: social partners, trade union learning reps and other kinds of workplace representatives who can help people to come forward and ask for training, and can explain to them what the offer is. Those things have been a much bigger part of our system in the past but some of them

have fallen away, which is a shame. That is really important for productivity.

Thank you for referencing that report. If it is the one I am thinking of, we showed that something like 2 million learning opportunities in English and maths had been lost over the past decade. We are doing okay by international comparison, but we are running to stand still. By 2035, most of the people who will be in the workforce then have already left school, and we really need to shift the dial on English and maths skills. Getting 90% of adults to have the essential skills needed by 2035 would require doubling literacy and numeracy achievement rates to 600,000 a year for a decade—that is, 3.5 million more adults gaining those skills to maintain our productivity and our global competitiveness. Everyone thinks that sounds like a lot of people, but it is only what we were doing in 2010, so we have done it before if we want to focus on it. That is the level of ambition that we need in order to address the productivity challenge, which the Government say they want to focus on.

Dr Sue Pember: To add to the partnerships, we are talking about things like probation libraries, sports centres, sports clubs and the academies that they have for young sportspeople. I am also thinking of Alcoholics Anonymous. All those partners are used by our adult education centres to deliver maths. They will put a specialist in, because you are capturing those people and trying to give them something else for their CVs. Partnership work is crucial to attract the learner in and to move them on. On the other side, the other partners are the local GFE colleges and universities. Again, the OECD stats, which we have probably not thought about, show that we have graduates with poor maths and literacy skills. So it goes both ways.

On the question of whether or not employers are a barrier, many vacancies are advertised through electronic recruitment systems, and normally, when you get to the third page onscreen, the ad will ask you what level of maths or English you have. It will be specific; it will say, "Have you got GCSE maths level 4 or above?" So, often people are not even getting to the interview stage because of this gold standard at GCSE. I have spent my career trying to say that there are alternative qualifications to GCSE, but we failed. For employers, it has to be a GCSE.

Now I am thinking, "What is it about GCSE that stops people getting it?" I know there are people around this table who know quite a lot about GCSE. It is a quota system. If you had 100 people tomorrow doing GCSE and they were all brilliant, only 60 of them would get it. Is the qualification name wrong or is it the system that is wrong? This does not happen in other countries. Other countries have a marker; you pass or fail, a bit more like a driving theory test. I believe that is what it should be for English and maths. We should have a different type of structure, even if we keep the name the same, because employers are never going to move from it.

Baroness Bull: Is there a visual representation—I am using Dipa's

term—of that huge network of providers? That network is incredible, and if there is such a representation then we would love to see it.

Marguerite Hogg: Yes. We can dig into that from the multiplier resources and send you links to it.

Q42 **Lord Hampton:** My original question has been very well answered—we were talking about using different ways of getting interventions in there, and you have talked about the maths bus, trade unions, housing associations, job centres and sports centres—so I am going to slightly open up the topic. I am going to hand each of you a magic wand. Unfortunately it is a slightly faulty magic wand, so it does not give you any more money and it does not bring back Multiply. I ask each of you to wave your wand, please.

Alex Stevenson: Something that maybe we have not fully picked up in the discussion so far is that a lot of the commissioning responsibility and budgets for adult education and skills have been devolved to mayoral combined authorities. Some of those have been doing interesting things with the powers that they have, commissioning new programmes focused on employer engagement or tweaking some of the funding rules to put a bit more of their resources into this area. It is important that we learn from what is going on in those areas.

Something that would help in terms of the ambition and focus on adult numeracy that we need is for the Government centrally to hold those devolved areas and mayors to account for the numeracy outcomes that are being delivered in those areas. That might just drive a bit of thinking and action among those local commissioners, who are well placed to bring people together—providers, communities and employers—and see if we can shift the dial a bit on adult numeracy.

Dr Sue Pember: That is a really interesting question, but we should all make a stand now that we do need more resource.

Lord Hampton: We take on board everything that you have said about that.

Dr Sue Pember: I appreciate that, and I am normally the one who tries to stretch the pound the most. Still, to answer your question, we need to be creative. Multiply has gone and we need a new initiative. We would have "maths for life" and we would make sure that it was a prerequisite of every plan in the country, an important feature. In that new "maths for life" initiative, we would have brilliant CPD and we would have partnerships.

We would make the rest of the Government sign up to it so that they used everything within their power to make sure that, wherever they touched someone who needed to do maths, maths was done.

Marguerite Hogg: Following that, we would then demystify maths and numeracy for everyday adults. If you are in college as an adult and you

are retraining to be a hairdresser, you do not need to know trigonometry, you need to know about volumes and measures. It needs to be contextualised for adults. GCSEs absolutely have their place and some people actually want to do them, and we should not take that away, but we should contextualise that numeracy.

Dipa Ganguli: We also need to introduce alternative pathways for adult learners. Rather than them repeatedly resitting GCSE, we should offer modular or vocationally orientated qualifications that measure progress rather than an achievement in exams.

Lord Hampton: And that have actual weight to them.

Dipa Ganguli: Yes.

Lord Massey of Hampstead: You mentioned "maths for life" almost as a slogan. Does the word "maths" turn people off?

Dr Sue Pember: That is an interesting point, and we have done quite a lot of research on it over time. You could say that numeracy is a softer word, but there is a whole group of people who think numeracy is too soft an option but they understand maths, because they have children in school where it has now gone back to maths, although it used to be the numeracy strategy. We can debate that, but it is a nice slogan. No one thought Multiply would work as a brand but it did, so let us be up front.

Q43 **Lord Stevenson of Balmacara:** You may have noticed that in one of our evidence sessions an employer told us that her firm felt it could not cope with the quality of people that it was recruiting, and felt that it could not ship that away, so it started running its own courses and is still doing so. What do you make of that, and where do you think that fits into the pattern of stuff? We have a situation where employers are setting a barrier—they say they will not recruit below GCSE maths, and they are not—but do we really want them to take on the burden of "maths for life" in a practical way?

Alex Stevenson: That is a really interesting question. There is definitely the potential to do more to harness the role of employers in this. Some employers will say that the foundational level of maths skills is the responsibility of the school system, but many of the leading larger employers recognise that there is a role for them to support ongoing upskilling and perhaps refreshing maths skills in the workplace, as well as supporting people who maybe have specific gaps in the numeracy skills that they need as they progress through roles.

Our current programmes, funding and structures do not work well for providers to be able to work effectively with employers, even if resources and investment had not declined over the years. What you can fund with the Adult Skills Fund and deliver in the workplace is a big qualification. That is too many hours for an employer to commit to, but it is relatively difficult to fund more bite-sized, smaller units of maths that are

contextualised specifically to the maths skills that people want in that workplace.

Being able to do more of that would be helpful. If mayoral combined authorities, for example, are innovating and thinking about different ways in which providers can use their skills funding to work with employers and tailor courses, then that is helpful. We know that there are big differences between what employers view as bite-sized training and what providers typically consider to be bite-sized. Employers are really looking for things that people can do in half an hour of downtime in accounts on a Friday afternoon. That is too small for what most providers can offer under the way that the system works, but if we had programmes that started to develop more of those kinds of things then that would be helpful.

We also know from our work on employee investment in training that having a sustained and consistent approach to funding is helpful in building relationships over time and involving employers in the designs of those programmes so that they really meet their needs. As I say, it has to be flexible and more modular, not just based on delivering a qualification that the employer does not want to buy. It needs to be about delivering a particular workplace outcome that the employer wants to see for their workforce.

Dr Sue Pember: I just want to say that that firm needs to be applauded. It is doing a fantastic job. I would like to think that there was a bit of open access there because the firm was not cherry-picking the best. We need as much help as we can get, and if every large employer in the country wanted to do that, then that would be great. Think of the motivation: you go on a maths course that an employer is running, and then you progress on to its apprenticeship. I would prefer it to be done with a local college or an adult ed centre, but either way employers should be encouraged.

Marguerite Hogg: All those things are good, but numeracy skills can also be part of a package. When colleges go out to employers, they offer things like health and safety training or food hygiene, so why can numeracy not be part of that package to their employees? We know that large employers do this quite well and address it. We have had examples of certain NHS trusts working with local providers through Multiply for their staff, and that has been really positive.

The concern, not just with numeracy but across the board with education and training, is about smaller employers that do not have the bandwidth to consider it or the time to allow staff to do that. That is something that needs more consideration.

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara: If you had some examples of that, it would be interesting to see them.

Marguerite Hogg: Yes.

Q44 **Lord Hannett of Everton:** I want to hone in on teachers specifically. I think Sue said she was confident about the ability of the teachers per se. Anecdotal information that I get from friends who are teachers is that a concern is that sometimes they are teaching subjects that are not what they necessarily specialise in, but it is a question of resource and so forth. On the specific issue about the retention of teachers, does retention remain a fundamental challenge because of morale? Or maybe it is subject to earnings, and so on. What effective mechanisms can be implemented to improve this? The first part of the question is about the duplication of other subjects that maybe are not their specialisms.

Dr Sue Pember: The adult education sector is going to be slightly different now from the further education sector. We did some research a few years ago, and most of our teachers in the adult education sector are well qualified. They have a certain qualification and are teacher-trained, but they are part-time and they get less money than a further education lecturer, who gets less money than a school teacher. However, because it is part-time and because they normally teach their specialism, we do not have the issues that you have just described, but we just do not have enough ESOL or maths teachers; we are for ever recruiting, and our teachers are poached by the FE world. This is where I hand over to Marguerite.

Marguerite Hogg: English and maths at 16 to 19 saw a funding uplift, which was great, but there was nothing similar for adults, and that inevitably impacts on the salaries paid to teachers of adult numeracy or maths classes. As we have said before, adult funding rates have been largely static for the last 15 years and all those delivery costs have risen. That means colleges often have to increase class sizes to make provision financially viable, or they strip back one-to-one support, which could disadvantage adult learners with more complex needs.

On teacher pay and retention, as Sue said, we probably pay a bit more than adult learning centres, but schools and HE pay more than FE. People will also choose to go into industry rather than coming to FE teaching because the pay is more. So it is difficult to recruit and retain teaching staff in adult education settings. That was evidenced in DfE's School Workforce Census, which reported an FE college teacher vacancy rate of 5.4% and a £9,300 gap between average FE college and school teacher pay. So there is a challenge there, for you and your stakeholders but certainly for us as well.

Lord Hannett of Everton: Again, if there is any further information on this that you could send us, by all means do so.

Dr Sue Pember: Do you want to talk about how you keep your staff?

Dipa Ganguli: I will. We have talked about pay so I am not going to repeat that, but our tutors are constantly talking about the administrative burden. These courses are funded and there is a requirement. A lot of them are sessional tutors, so they could be coming in on a Wednesday

night and teaching but then they have four hours of paperwork that providers and colleges like mine cannot pay for, because it is additional work and, since we do not have the funding for it, we cannot pay for that. That is why our teachers say the workload is too much. They do it because they passionately believe in it, but that is definitely not sustainable. That is why we are losing teachers and finding them difficult to recruit and then retain.

Lord Hannett of Everton: I want to ask about the mechanisms here. Do you have any suggestions about what could be done?

Dipa Ganguli: We are looking at whether technology can ease some of the burden. Because they are working with learners who have been let down by the school system, or who feel they are not good at maths, there is a lot of pastoral care that goes in. It is not just about teaching the subject; that care takes up a lot of time as well. So we are trying to see how we can support them with mentors or peer support, or whether they as a department can come up with resources. Again, the resources have to be relevant to the learner base that is coming. You cannot repeat something that you created three years ago because the learners who are coming through are very different from who you may have had three years ago.

Marguerite Hogg: Can I come in with some more stats for you? We at the Association of Colleges run an English and maths survey every year. Last year's survey reported that 78% of colleges had difficulty in recruiting maths teachers, and that was up from 36% in 2022—quite a big jump—and that 87% of colleges are asking learning support staff to train as maths teachers. I can send you that report.

Q45 **Lord Blackwell:** You have given us a lot of interesting information about both the importance of the topic and the complex web of approaches to dealing with it. We will produce a report with recommendations that the Government have to respond to, and the more specific and concrete those recommendations are then the more likely it is to have some impact. I ask each of you: if there is just one thing that you would like to see in the recommendations that would make a difference, what would it be?

Dipa Ganguli: Obviously, funding is the essential one. However, there is a bigger responsibility here, and I shall give you a quick example. We have all come across petrol prices. Imagine teaching an entry level 1 learner what £1.349 means. What is 0.9 of a pence? They have just got their head around £1.34. Why do we have £1.349? There are practical questions here. If we want our population—our community—to be numerate then we have a wider responsibility in how we present the numbers that are there. I will say that every learner who enrols, who shows up to class and who sits for an exam is trying to change the narrative of their competency, and we have a responsibility to provide them with support so that they can succeed.

Marguerite Hogg: You would probably expect this, but I will say that adult skills funding levels must be restored to meet the demand of learners and employers. If we had that fair level of funding in place then colleges could tailor their adult skills programmes to meet those adult numeracy needs and the needs of the local labour market. Doing that would probably also address some of the challenges around teacher recruitment and retention. I am also going to squeeze in flexibility and simplicity, as well as funding.

Lord Blackwell: Just to be clear: you are saying that we do not need to invent something new or even reinvent it—we just need to fund it?

Marguerite Hogg: We need to fund it and to be flexible with it.

Dr Sue Pember: That answer links to mine. We know that we need to promote maths. Whatever programme we have, whether it was what we called Multiply or what we might call "maths for life", needs to be promoted at the top of Government. My one thing is that the Government have to continually say that it is important, and then DfE and DWP should pick that up and promote and fund the entitlement. The last bit of that is to use every lever they have in planning and setting priorities with the mayoral combined authorities. We need every lever that they have across Government to bring this in because, as Alex has said, the numbers are big and we cannot do it just as one sector. It has to be everyone.

Alex Stevenson: I agree with the points that have been made about around investment. Sue is right that we need to set a higher ambition nationally on numeracy and skills. The Government need to recognise that that is fundamental to its ambitions for growth, opportunity and productivity, some of the things that we have discussed in this session today. That requires investment but we also need to think about who is doing that investment. If public finances are constrained, then let us think about ways in which we can incentivise employer investment in skills. That could include thinking about how we use a reformed growth and skills levy to support adult numeracy learning for people in work. I agree with Sue that we need to weave this through skills policy nationally, but also at the local and combined authority level. Let us hold local mayors to account for those numeracy outcomes and see if that drives a bit of focus and a bit of action on numeracy skills.

The Chair: Baroness Alexander has an open question to probe any gaps that we may have left.

Q46 **Baroness Alexander of Cleveden:** In your summations there, you talked quite a lot about the need for funding and leadership from Government, all of which I think the committee will take on board. I want to invite you to also have a further word about how we stimulate that demand from the bottom up, and the motivation.

I do not want to impugn anyone on the panel, but I am assuming most of you have been teaching for, shall we say, in excess of 10 years, maybe

two decades. Look at what has changed in that context: rising performance in mathematics in schools; parents wanting to help; young people trying to go into the workforce and discovering that a GCSE in maths is a gateway qualification for them even to be able to fill out the form for consideration; people in middle age needing help to manage chronic health conditions; and vast swathes of people being invited to take on personal financial planning when, in the past, they would have had a workplace occupational pension. You would assume that those drivers would have generated extraordinary demand in the last decade. How do we stimulate that demand, given that the societal needs have, if anything, intensified for the reasons the panel have shared with us. Any thoughts?

Alex Stevenson: It is a really tough question. It comes back to this point that we have discussed around having a clear offer to adults and then connecting people to it. As you say, those life stage, transition and key life event moments are really important as opportunities for when we can reach people. It is important that if you go into the jobcentre, they know what the support is and they can join you up with that support. That is the bit that needs to be put together behind the scenes. If we did that across a range of public services and contexts, that would make a difference to the numbers of people coming forward.

Dr Sue Pember: Your question is really interesting, because there is an assumption that demand is not there. The demand is there. We proved that through Multiply. We are dampening demand, because we cannot have people calling helplines saying they want a maths class and it is not there for them. We are not working with the partners like we could do, because we would be letting them down.

Your question is, really: how can we be confident enough to increase demand? That is a different type of problem. The necessity for doing this is so obvious: it is a productivity issue; it is a personal issue; it is an issue about our children; it is an issue about the country's prosperity. We have now got the evidence, but the big question is: why have we never persuaded our colleagues in the Treasury to fund us? That is what it comes down to. Twenty years ago, we did not have the evidence of why it matters. We have got that evidence now. We could be cross-questioned—you do not know how to do it. We know how to do it. We are dampening demand, because we have not got the funding.

Marguerite Hogg: I am not a teacher and have never been one. I think I said at the beginning that I have had major maths anxiety. I did a politics, philosophy and economics degree as an adult a few years ago, and I really struggled with the economics. The policy bit of it was absolutely fine, but the maths element was horrendous. For someone who needs that support, but has not accessed it, it is about having a different way of talking about maths and that it is just normal to talk about numbers and numeracy. It is what it can do. For example, with a syllabus, it is how you contextualise it—what is the benefit to the

individual? That for me is key. It just needs to be commonplace across everyday life.

Dipa Ganguli: I just want to add that one of the ways that we have been attracting learners is actually going out into the community. They may not want to walk into a college building, but they are quite comfortable going to the local community centre, and we are taking learning to them. But there is the demand, as Sue said; we just do not have the funding to take any more learners on.

The Chair: We are out of time; thank you so much. I would like you to write to us on this question, because I think it overhangs everything, of where you would get the money from. Sue talks loosely of going to the Treasury and beating them up. But I genuinely do not think we talk enough about this in politics. Where is the money going to come from? At the beginning, one of you mentioned that you thought the shortfall is £5 billion a year. That is a penny on income tax, very roughly. Please write to us and give us your thoughts.

I am interested because this is my own problem—inefficiency in government. Are there wasteful pots of money in the education system? I would like to hear your views on that, because I certainly found them when I was involved, to much controversy, I would say. People did not like it, but I did find it. In my day job today in education, we have just ploughed it straight back into the front line. Nobody is benefiting other than the children, ultimately. I want to hear from you on that, because we have to frame this debate in government. We have spent all the money over the last 25 years. Our debt is at 100% of our GDP. We are maxed out, basically.

I agree with you though, that this will drive productivity. Emotionally, I agree with you 100%. Do not think that I am just a Gradgrind; many people do. This is a very important piece of the armoury to drive productivity and indeed the empowerment of individuals.

Dipa, you made some practical suggestions about making the exam questions simpler in the language being used, because that would be easy to do. There are things on the margin that I hope we can pick up from you.

But anyway, thank you all so much. It has been extremely interesting, and I have learnt a lot. If you have other thoughts, do write in.