HOUSE OF COMMONS

Education Committee

Oral evidence: 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' White Paper, HC 430

Tuesday 1 September 2026

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Helen Hayes (Chair); Jess Asato; Sureena Brackenridge; Manuela Perteghella; Mark Sewards; Peter Swallow; Caroline Voaden.

Questions 1-33

Witnesses

I: Alun Francis OBE, Chair, Social Mobility Commission, Daniel Lilley, Head of Youth, Centre for Social Justice and Julie McCulloch, Chief Executive, The Education Policy Institute.

II: James Bowen, Assistant General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers, Mrs Julia Harnden, Deputy Director of Policy, Association of School and College Leaders, Daniel Kebede, General Secretary, The National Education Union and Darren Northcott, National Official, NASUWT.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alun Francis, Daniel Lilley and Julie McCulloch.

Chair: I welcome everybody to this oral evidence session of the Education Committee, and I welcome colleagues back from summer recess. This is the first evidence session in our new inquiry in which we are scrutinising the Government's White Paper entitled "Every child achieving and thriving" ahead of what we believe will be legislation coming forward later in the autumn or early in the new year. We are also scrutinising the White Paper in the light of some subsequent policy announcements that the new Administration has been making over the summer.

I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today. I will invite each of you to introduce yourselves, but before I do, I invite Committee members to make any declarations of interest.

Peter Swallow: I declare that I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for schools, learning and assessment, the secretariat of which is the NEU. We have just produced a report on votes at 16, which might be relevant today.

Sureena Brackenridge: I declare that I am a former member of ASCL.

Chair: Now we will go to introductions from our witnesses.

Daniel Lilley: My name is Daniel Lilley. I am the head of youth at the Centre for Social Justice.

Julie McCulloch: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Julie McCulloch, chief executive of the Education Policy Institute. Thank you very much for enabling me to join this session remotely.

Alun Francis: Hello, everybody, and thank you very much for also allowing me to join remotely. My name is Alun Francis. I am the chair of the Social Mobility Commission and I am the chief executive of Blackpool and The Fylde College, which also includes Furness College in Barrow.

Q1 **Chair:** I will lead off our questioning with a question about some of the changes in policy. We have the White Paper, which is the Government's formal statement of current policy, but over the summer the new Prime Minister announced further changes to policy specifically around technical pathways and the delivery of technical and vocational education in secondary schools, as well as plans for devolution. I would like to ask, first, for your understanding of how the new announcements have an impact on the existing White Paper and the impact that they will have on schools seeking to navigate one policy change and then a further evolution and iteration of the policy that has come subsequently.

Julie McCulloch: My opening comment is that it is probably not entirely clear yet how much of the White Paper the new Prime Minister and Secretary of State remain entirely committed to and how much they want to change or align with different priorities. So this is my best understanding as things stand.

In terms of the new changes that we are expecting, our view as an organisation is that there is a lot to admire about England's education, but we think there continue to be some significant challenges. We think it is a system that works very well for some children and young people in some ways but much less well for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is one of our major areas of focus, and those with SEND, and also in promoting pupil engagement and strong mental health for all children and young people. So we definitely think there is a case for delivering on many of the proposals that are in the White Paper as it stands but also for thinking whether there is more that we can do in those areas.

We think there are things that need to change. We definitely think that improved technical education, as the Prime Minister is now proposing, should be one of those changes. It feels to us as if the system is still very much one in which the default assumption is that young people will follow an academic pathway, with options for those who want to follow a more technical or vocational pathway being both fewer and much more complicated to navigate. We are pleased to see those changes, but the challenge—as you are alluding to in this question, Chair—is how the

system can navigate and understand both the direction of travel set out in the White Paper and what changes we might see now.

In terms of those newer changes, it is important that they are done carefully, drawing on relevant evidence and not undermining the academic improvements that we have seen over the past decade, and that they recognise many of the reasons for the disadvantage gap and the shocking number of young people not in education, employment or training. Many of the ways that we tackle those challenges sit within education, but many more sit outside it, in the labour market, health, social care and welfare. In summary, we are warm to the changes in the White Paper and to those that the new Administration is hoping to bring in, but there is a lot of devil in the detail in how those two slightly separate visions at the moment are brought together and how we make sure that both are delivered in a really clear and evidence-informed way.

Alun Francis: That was a really coherent summary of some of the areas where we are clear and not clear. To pick up first on the technical pathways, obviously that is my specialism and my day job, and something we in the Social Mobility Commission are keen on. We have been keen to see a much stronger technical pathway alongside the university pathway. It is clearly the case that over a long period of time, one has had much more attention and funding than the other.

I will make a couple of observations about the whole academic or technical debate, though. The first point to make is that everybody has some of both at some point in their career. We all start off with general academic education, in primary and most of secondary. There is then a question mark about when we move over to some more technical training. Some people do that at 16, particularly things like craft trades, construction and so forth. Others do it at 18, particularly higher and degree apprenticeships, which now allow you to start your degree a little bit earlier, in the workplace. Others start their technical vocational training after they have completed their degree—the typical examples would be medicine, law and teaching—so I think we have to be careful not to set them up as opposites. They are very much complementary and have a large degree of overlap.

That leads me to a second point, which is that we must not confuse technical education as an alternative to academic learning, because actually there is so much overlap between them. The best technical education requires really strong academic skills. You can see that in the way that, for example, T-levels have been constructed, and in apprenticeships, which frequently require good English and good maths. We must avoid the idea that they are somehow alternatives to each other.

That being said, there is a great deal about attraction. Some people find the applied learning of an apprenticeship or a technical course more appealing and motivating than they find academic study. I do not think that is necessarily reflective of academic ability; I just think it is about motivation and interest. The question we then have to ask ourselves is, at what point do we allow people to make that transition? The notion of

having clearer pathways from 14 is a really good one in the sense that it is very helpful for young people—this comes out of the research on NEETs and various other sources—to have a clear line of sight to work, to understand how the qualifications they are studying can help them to move in the direction of the career that they want to go into. Whether that means that we need to start to think about a 14-to-16 technical curriculum in schools involves some really hard questions that we have to ask.

The first point to make is that, when we taught technical education in schools before, we did it really badly. We ended up devaluing the qualifications and actually encouraging young people to take courses that schools were very keen for them to take, because they improved league table performance, but in all honesty, the young people would arrive at college not ready for the workplace or to progress, and they would have to resit quite a bit of work that they had done. That was the work that the Wolf review challenged in vocational qualifications becoming less valuable.

We will also need to think about whether young people are ready, at 14, to make those choices, which can be quite weighty. As you probably know, in Europe the system works differently—but it is the whole system that works differently, as well as the labour market. We need to bear that in mind. That being said, my college currently delivers a 14-to-16 programme for a group of local schools; under the right circumstances, with the right, skilled tutors, the right kit and equipment, and the right facilities, such programmes can be powerful additions to the general curriculum.

My final point is that there is potentially a role for strategic authorities and mayors to think about how they can broker that kind of provision, as long as it is of high quality and an actual choice for the student that sits alongside their other choices, and as long as students have a clear line of sight to work and it is not presented as, "Well, we just want to get you out of class and into something else because we do not know what to do with you."

If the provision is brokered in that way, groups of schools working with colleges could be productive in thinking what a 14-to-16 pathway might look like. The broader Manchester baccalaureate philosophy—thinking about careers and groups of choices that lead to careers—definitely does not always mean changing the curriculum; it just means helping young people to get the right work experience and so on. There are some really productive ideas to be brought in that regard. I will stop there.

Daniel Lilley: A lot of ground was covered there, so I will just make two short comments. The first interesting thing is that the White Paper—broadly speaking and zooming out—emphasised continuity in synthesising what had come before. It is not yet clear that the implication of this announcement has been that it will emphasise discontinuity from what has come before.

At the Centre for Social Justice, we are cautiously optimistic about the idea of technical education at 14. We have advocated for it and worked with the now Prime Minister on it while he was Mayor of Greater Manchester. But we really think that it should sit within the continuity framework of the White Paper. Some things will need relitigating in terms of how we look at the EBacc, Attainment 8 and Progress 8. If the policy is to function well and not look second rate, those things have to be relitigated. But in general we would really like it to be integrated within that continuity document, which we think synthesises a lot of really good work.

Q2 **Chair:** There is some concern, based on past experience in this country, about technical education; as Alun said, it has not always been delivered very well. The concern is about the risk of a technical pathway from 14 resulting essentially in a limitation of the academic aspirations of some children and proving to be a constraint on social mobility for children from some backgrounds.

Briefly, what policies, mechanisms and checks and balances need to be built into the new system—each of you has broadly welcomed the intention—that would guard against the risk of its becoming a limiting factor on some children's aspirations, rather than a broadening of aspirations and outcomes?

Daniel Lilley: There are three points in particular. The first is about what the policy is seeking to achieve. It will go wrong if it is designed as something for children who are failing in education; that would be incompatible with parity of esteem. There has to be an aim for high-performing children to be taking this technical pathway. What problem are we trying to fix? I think it is a lack of technical excellence in the system.

The second thing to make the policy work is that it needs to latch on to something at 16. Look at the issues with T-levels—in many ways, the children who have done them have been very successful, but T-levels have had very low take-up because they have been somewhat incongruous; there has not been a runway up to them. This is an opportunity for embedding such a runway into the system.

The third thing somewhat repeats my previous answer. The policy needs to be integrated into the accountability frameworks. For it to have the same esteem, it needs to have the same rules and sharp edges as the academic framework. It needs to sit in things like Attainment 8 and Progress 8, and potentially even some sort of EBacc/TBacc-style thing.

Alun Francis: I agree with all of those comments. I would also add that I think it needs to be a high-quality qualification. It needs to be a clear choice that involves the young person and their parents so that it does not become an option that is imposed on people. Where young people are struggling with their English and maths, in particular, it has to be a condition that the English and maths continue to be a high priority because we cannot ignore those challenges.

I also think it needs to be carefully managed in the relationship between schools, colleges and strategic authorities, as the scale of this for

employers could be overwhelming because of the number of people looking for work placements and so forth. That is where the brokerage role of the strategic authorities could be quite productive. Keeping that balance between the school and the college on expertise is, I think, very important.

Julie McCulloch: I also agree with both of those points, so I will just add a couple of extra thoughts. One is about teachers. I take on board Alun's really good points about how we can have schools and colleges working together more closely, but to deliver this vision we will have to look at the skills, knowledge, backgrounds and expertise of teachers in schools as well as colleges, particularly if we are looking to extend some slightly different options down to 14. We need to look really closely at what we need from the teaching workforce to deliver that.

The other point that I would make is that we need to be really cautious—I do not think that this is where we are, but there is a danger that we could go there—about thinking that this solves all the issues, particularly those around disengagement and disadvantage. We know that whatever route children and young people take, disadvantaged students need more focused support than many of their peers and than is often currently possible in our tightly funded schools and colleges, whatever route they take.

Let's make sure that we are looking really carefully at having the right teachers in place and the right wider support to sit alongside the broadening of the curriculum that I think we are looking at.

Q3 **Peter Swallow:** I think we have covered this extensively, but I want to ask one brief question, perhaps to Julie. There is sometimes a risk in having this conversation that we fall into the trap of thinking that vocational subjects are the only place where students develop skills, whereas the reality is that skills are taught across the curriculum. Are you concerned about that and what do we need to do to ensure that the academic side of the curriculum is also better at delivering and articulating the skills that it is teaching our young people?

Julie McCulloch: That is absolutely right. Too often, as a system, we have fallen into that slightly tiresome debate between knowledge and skills. We know that both knowledge and skills are essential and both are developed through a range of different pathways, approaches and routes that children and young people take.

What is really important, and what is implied in your question, is that we should essentially make sure that the policy pendulum does not swing too far away from the significant benefits we have seen in academic knowledge and skills over the past few years. There is no reason why it should or why it needs to; with intelligent policy design we can keep what has been beneficial about that focus on academic skills, particularly for disadvantaged children, that we have seen recently while recognising some of the challenges of that to curriculum breadth, engagement and opening up different routes. It is about ensuring that we do that at a

national policy design level and about how, as this plays out in individual schools and colleges, we do it in a really mindful way and recognise the potential benefits and the challenges.

Q4 **Mark Sewards:** The Government's White Paper sets several ambitions, and I want to ask about one. It says that, on average, by 2040 children will leave school achieving a grade 5 or higher across their GCSEs. There was obviously a slight fall this year, but there are 14 years to go yet. In your view, what steps need to be taken to achieve the necessary changes within the timeframe set out? It would be helpful if you could touch on whether you think any changes need to be made to the curriculum and assessment.

Daniel Lilley: Could I confirm whether you are asking about the specific ambition for achievements in English and maths?

Mark Sewards: The ambition is that, on average, "children will leave school achieving a grade 5 or higher across their GCSEs", so not just in English and Maths.

Daniel Lilley: Okay. The great strength of an ambition like that is also the great weakness of it—it is a bit like GDP. It compresses and condenses so much information and so many different factors into something that gives you a really clear sense of system health in one number. That is extremely helpful for understanding what is going on in the education system, but very difficult for understanding what specifically contributes to it and what specifically is causing different movements that we see in the number, which then makes your question very difficult to answer. That is one of the cautions that we have to exercise when we chase the really big numbers, as it were. It is the same with halving the disadvantage gap—the same thing would be true.

Mark Sewards: I will come on to that.

Daniel Lilley: To try to give a specific answer, the strategy has to match the metric, and it has to be a broader system health strategy, as opposed to something specific. Attendance would be a different example, where you have a very specific number that you can then have a specific strategy for, whereas this is a very general number that compresses lots. Really, the strategy should be, "Make the system function as well as you can", and that number should move.

Mark Sewards: Thank you—I appreciate that.

Julie McCulloch: It is hard to disaggregate an answer to the question about the attainment ambition and the ambition on closing the gap, but I will try to focus on attainment and then perhaps we will come on to the disadvantage gap afterwards. It feels absolutely like those two are both the right ambitions. Having those as parallel ambitions is really important, because there is a danger that they can fight against each other. It is easier to close the gap by focusing on children who are more likely to achieve a higher target, so it is really important that those are both there.

When I look at the work that the Education Policy Institute does, particularly around the latest version of our annual report, which looks at attainment and gaps—again, it is quite hard to disaggregate—we are seeing that the socioeconomic disadvantage gaps remain wider than before the pandemic at every stage. The recovery we had started to see has either stalled or reversed at all stages of education. So keeping that attainment target, as well as the gap target, is hugely important.

In terms of what changes we need to see to achieve that, the answer comes from looking at which groups of children do not currently achieve in a way that would enable us to meet that target. Those are particularly pupils with special educational needs and children from certain ethnic backgrounds. There is a huge geographical piece to this as well, which we might come on to later when we talk about the missions.

Looking at changes focusing on which groups of young people are not achieving what we need and making sure that our policies are focused on supporting those groups will enable us to close that gap. Some of those might sit within the curriculum and assessment review, but most of those changes are probably outside of curriculum. They are more in the space of funding, focus and structures, which we might come to in other questions.

Mark Sewards: That is really helpful. Alun, although I did not mention the disadvantage gap in my question, feel free to refer to it, as both Daniel and Julie have.

Alun Francis: I will try to stick to three points, which I think will complement the points that have been made already. The first point I would make about the next 14 years is that it worries me that if you take the 20 worst-performing local authorities in the year 2000 and compare them with now, they are pretty much the same, with the exception of London. London has bucked the trend considerably. If you look across the other areas, they are pretty much all post-industrial towns or coastal areas, with one or two rural areas in there. What concerns me about that is how deep rooted the problem is around the attainment gap and around the geography of that, and we must recognise how important place is in understanding what is happening. That is my first point.

My second point, which is slightly more controversial, is that we have a problem where, whenever we see anybody improving outcomes, it becomes instantly very political—I know you are all politicians, so I am saying this to you all, not any single one of you—but that is actually very unhelpful. When we have schools that are apparently high-achieving, we need to understand properly why that is the case. What happens, generally speaking, is that it becomes a bit of a political football, and we never get to the bottom of what they are doing that is working, if it is working.

That is very important for another reason, which is that we can see a whole set of schools and social circumstances in London that may explain the improvement in outcomes for children. Some of them appear to be demographic changes and others appear to be educational changes. If we

want the rest of the country to start to learn the lessons of that, we need to understand what sits behind it. We need to start to think systematically about how we can extend across the country what we know works, and that is the part we are not very good at. We still have those areas I have described that are not doing that well.

There is a second point, which I will come back to later if anybody wants to. The Social Mobility Commission has recently been doing a qualitative piece of research into NEETs in Blackpool. One of the things that has come out of that research and has stuck in my mind and that of the commissioners is that, for all the range of factors that we can look at—and there are many; there is always a complex range of factors in any of these situations—one of the things that stands out that we do not have a tight grip on is what we have called—we have not invented this term; we borrowed it—the psychosocial aspect of underachievement and underperformance.

We know quite a lot about what it takes for students to perform well, and many schools can describe what that process will look like in terms of teaching, learning and assessment. But we also have a huge body of research around what we might loosely call disengagement. Why do some people disengage from learning? What is it that is taking place that leads to that? They point to things like issues with planning, goal setting, thinking ahead and emotional control, but there are also things about the experience of failure if you are the one who always tends to come last, and how that impacts on your engagement with learning. You do not have the same sense of expectation and anticipation. Learning becomes something that you feel ashamed of, or you don't want to engage with because you find it painful.

I do not think there is any single easy explanation for this. What troubles me about the whole debate about improving outcomes is that although we are absolutely right to focus on the outcomes of those who are not doing so well, and to focus on belonging and the importance of getting a system that works well for them, I just do not think we have a clear educational theory about what it is we need to do in learning to help them to overcome those obstacles. I know I have opened up a big issue in saying that, but it is an important debate. Do we really know what needs to happen for those most disengaged learners to be more successful?

Q5 **Mark Sewards:** That's right. I am sorry to cut you off but we have eight more questions and 30 minutes, so I am going to ditch one of my questions and just ask this. We have talked about the disadvantage gap—you were quite right to bring it up in your answers, because you cannot tackle one without talking about the other. The Government's ambition or target on the disadvantage gap primarily focuses on the performance of pupils who have been eligible for free school meals for six years, and those who have been in care at some point. Is that too narrow? Does it need to be broadened? I am very keen to hear your answers on that, starting with Daniel.

Daniel Lilley: One of our founding principles at the Centre for Social Justice was that the way we look at poverty in this country is reductive. Obviously, the issue with that is that it becomes very difficult practically to define poverty if you define it in a deeper way. In that vein, if we moved in either direction in terms of specificity, we would do better.

On the one hand, we could strip back the focus and say we are going to isolate children who are falling behind in school. We do educating, schools are the home of opportunity—we are going to focus on those falling behind and catch them up. We do not then get into the question of exactly how we define disadvantage and hardship, and just focus on those falling behind.

The other option is to go in the other direction and say that we need to look at family structure, debt and addiction. We need to look at the security of their housing. We need to see whether they are in an inter-generationally workless household. We to need to properly understand the context of this child and what, outside of school, is stopping them achieving. When you do that process, you can properly identify challenges and focus areas. Either of those would be better than what we currently do.

Julie McCulloch: Free school meals is a very helpful proxy—it has enabled lots of analysis over many years—but we do think that a move towards a more income-based measure would be more helpful and would be useful to do at this point, for a number of reasons. One is that many children in poverty are not currently captured in the free school meal measure, and that varies across different pupil characteristics, geography and time. It is felt particularly acutely in the early years and the first years of primary school, where there are many children whose families have not registered as being eligible for free school meals but who could be. A move towards a more income-based measure that captures that and moves away from requiring families to self-declare would be really helpful. It would mean that more of the children who would benefit from the additional funding that comes from that identification would be helped.

It is really important that any threshold that is used to identify disadvantage and provide additional funding is reviewed regularly and adjusted in line with inflation, the cost of living and so on. We are also interested in how geography—area-based measures of disadvantage—sits alongside that, as well as measures of persistent disadvantage, which we think need much more focus.

Alun Francis: I will keep it brief, because I agree with both previous contributors' comments. I think that disadvantage is much broader than income or free school meals. I will give a couple of examples from my own experience. One is that in areas like Blackpool the impact of private sector housing and the instability of housing is a much bigger issue for some young people than anyone can imagine. Daniel picked out a really good example.

The second thing I have noticed is a very strong correlation between family size and structure, and which families are in the poorest parts of town. The students who are on the entry level 1 courses at college at 16 will predominantly come from families who are much bigger, often with only one parent, and you can imagine the stresses and circumstances that go with that. If we only focus on things like free school meals, there is a spectrum of people, and if we want to really change the outcomes for the most disadvantaged, we have to be much more searching in the questions we ask, in ways that are not stigmatising but that try to get us to focus on improving outcomes for the very truly disadvantaged.

Mark Sewards: Thank you very much Alun. I will leave it there.

Q6 **Jess Asato:** My question closely follows what you have been discussing, and is about the new model for targeting disadvantage funding through the national funding formula. Julie, you mentioned widening it to look more broadly at income; should the funding focus on other areas? We heard from Alun that housing should be a factor, but there is a range of ideas out there about what else you might focus the money on. Would you like to add anything further?

Julie McCulloch: There is a range of options. I think there is also a danger that this becomes too complex to administer, both centrally and for individual schools. There is an argument for making broader funding streams to schools as helpful as they can be in recognising the different circumstances in which those schools are operating, but keeping the pupil premium—that very focused funding for disadvantaged children—as straightforward as it can be. It is helpful to look at those two things slightly differently.

In terms of the pupil premium itself, we welcome the interest in looking slightly differently at how it is targeted and particularly, as I started to say at the end of my last answer, in looking at how we offer as much support as we possibly can to children in persistent disadvantage. We use the measure of children who have been living in poverty for at least 80% of their time at school so far. Those children do much worse than most other groups of children, and we are seeing no improvement in closing the gap between their attainment and others. So a focus on persistent disadvantage is hugely important, but it needs to be done in a way that keeps things as straightforward as possible.

We would like to see more focus on persistent disadvantage, and we would also like to see the pupil premium extended beyond the age of 16. At the moment it stops at 16, just at the point where young people are moving into post-16 education, when they—particularly those from more disadvantaged backgrounds—often most need additional support. It has long been our position that there needs to be an equivalent of the pupil premium in the 16-to-19 phase.

Alun Francis: I do not have a huge amount to add. The problem with formulas is that they are formulas and there is never a perfect way of designing a formula that applies in every case. It is about how you get the

general rules right and sufficient to say, "Actually, there is a lot of judgment to be made in individual cases as to where schools and colleges provide the individual support that people need."

I do not think there is ever a perfect way, but it is about looking beyond free school meals and taking into account wider factors. Julie's point about making it administratively simple is right, or we will all tie ourselves in knots. I do not envy the person who has to sort the policy out.

Daniel Lilley: I have a short observation on what seems to be the direction of travel, which I think is interesting. To build somewhat on Julie's comments, the direction is towards isolating persistent disadvantage in a smaller cohort of more persistently disadvantaged children and then having more missions on areas, and having place-based capturing of the nuance—"There's a problem here and a problem here. We will take from the pot that we will essentially save from having a more direct focus and build missions across the country." That seems to be the direction of travel. I can follow up in a briefing to provide comment on that, but I do think it is an interesting change.

Q7 **Jess Asato:** The good news is that my next question is literally about those missions. The Government have launched Mission North East and Mission Coastal—as a coastal MP, I am very excited about that. What lessons can be learned from similar place-based policies, such as the London Challenge and opportunity areas?

Daniel Lilley: That is an excellent question, and it somewhat builds on Alun's earlier comments about the London Challenge. The London Challenge is an extremely helpful case study and proof of concept from which to work, but it also has its uniquenesses, and we have to be careful as to what extent we can apply it. For example, the issues that the north-east faces are quite different from the issues that London faced in that context. One of the things that was so brilliant about the London Challenge was that there was a synergy of lots of different things going on at the same time that seemed to build on one another. The leadership of the London Challenge captured that momentum but did not act alone in it. It was very much a lightning rod in a context where you had Teach First, academisation, demographic change and other moving parts.

This weekend, we published a piece of research looking at the NEETs crisis in the north-east. One thing we have seen, which is very similar to what Alun commented on, is that the north-east does quite well until the end of primary school. Year-on-year data obviously varies, but as of last year it was the second highest performing region at the end of year 6, but then comfortably last by age 16—a large fall-off in that environment. On the one hand that is encouraging, because the secondary school-based mission has a real opportunity, as there is a platform from which to grow. On the other hand, it suggests that things outside of school are the main factors in that fall-off and that there is a lack of aspiration.

We obviously have a very high NEETs rate in the north-east, and have done for 20 years. We have not had economic growth in the north-east for

coming on 40 years. There is a broader question there as well. My one concern for Mission North East would be that if every secondary school was brilliant, how much would the problem be fixed?

Julie McCulloch: I strongly agree with Daniel's points. Just to add a little more detail, a lot of our research looks at the variable disadvantage gap across different regions. Looking at the latest data on that, I think the focus—the proposed focus, at least, as it was in the White Paper on the north-east and on coastal areas—is absolutely right. That is consistent with evidence of where some of the gaps are. I would add the south-west to that. That is the other region where we see significant challenges in terms of closing the gap. That is important and powerful, and I hope it will continue.

I would add a couple of other points. One is that there are a lot of differences when you look at sub-regions—at individual local authorities as well as regions as a whole. If you look at the difference between the highest performing and the lowest performing local authorities in terms of the disadvantage gap, that equates to almost two years of learning. It can be too broad brush sometimes to look at a regional level without really drilling down into the details.

To completely reinforce something that Daniel said as well, I should say that when you look at the reasons for the challenges in those areas, you see that they need a cross-governmental, cross-societal approach to solve them. If we continue with that mission-led Government, which I really hope we do, thinking about those challenges across all those areas that affect children, young people and their families will be really important when addressing those challenges.

Alun Francis: Those comments are absolutely excellent. I have a few brief comments. No. 1 is that we have had dozens of place-based approaches, and I am not sure we all know what we have learned from those. Think back to Excellence in Cities and education action zones: one of the things that worries me sometimes about those approaches—this was alluded to in earlier comments—is that improving the institutions and the institutional measures is not necessarily improving the outcomes for the children. There are certainly experiences and examples that we can point to—yes, you could say at the end that schools look like they are better, but are the outcomes for everybody who goes there better?

The point about the wider issues is really important. Let me refer again to some of our recent research. When young people talk about moving to employment, one of the things they talk about is how difficult it is for their families to help them; their families might be broadly supportive but just don't have any experience of work and or of the occupations that young people want to choose. That is more difficult in areas where there is less work or less well-paid work, and where you meet fewer people who have those higher-level occupations.

To that broader issue of a cross-governmental approach, thinking about improving educational outcomes in the broader context of improving the

economy and broadening opportunities are all important. That is why the devolution agenda is as important to this as the missions themselves.

Q8 **Manuela Perteghella:** My question is for Julie. A third of all pupils do not currently achieve grade 4 in GCSE English and Maths, and those pupils are more at risk of ending up not being in education, employment or training. In your view, what is the best way for the school system to support those pupils who are currently struggling at key stage 4?

Julie McCulloch: That is a big question. I will try to offer some immediate thoughts, and then some of them may come up through the later discussion as well.

I won't labour the point, but at the risk of repeating myself again, the cross-Government approach to looking at the challenges of those young people not reaching grade 4—the forgotten third, as we often call them—is hugely important. I would absolutely reiterate that point.

To add a couple of others, we need to look really closely at the attendance of those children and young people. We may talk a bit more about attendance later, so I will give a bit more detail then, but according to our research the really crucial importance of attendance, and the even greater importance of attendance for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds, comes through time and again.

The Government have had a really helpful focus on attendance so far. Continuing that, thinking beyond attendance targets for schools and really thinking about what support schools, families and communities need to help with those attendance figures, which are starting to improve a little bit post pandemic, will really help.

The other point is that we need to look closely at what we are measuring with that statistic. It is based on the attainment of students in English and maths GCSEs. It is a really important statistic, but it is worth looking under the bonnet at what those qualifications are measuring. Are they really the best measure of the literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills that young people need to be successful? I would argue that they are not. They are important qualifications, but it is worth looking at what is actually being measured through them and what that tells us.

Linked to that, what happens next to young people who have not achieved a grade 4? At the moment, they go into a resit mill, where many of them really struggle to achieve those qualifications at another sitting, and often another sitting again. We need to think carefully about how we can help young people who have not got to those grades in the first place to be more successful as they go into their post-16 education and support schools, and colleges in particular, to do that.

Q9 **Manuela Perteghella:** That comes to my next question. The panel has mentioned the issue of GCSE resits in English and maths, a process that can be quite demoralising and demotivating for our young people. The Government have announced that pupils attaining below grade 2 at GCSE in English and maths will take a separate stepping-stone qualification. Do

you support that proposal? Should that type of qualification be a high-quality alternative to GCSE English and maths rather than a stepping stone?

Julie McCulloch: I am sure that Alun will also have views on this from working in his institutions. The stepping-stone qualification is an interesting idea. Within the current system, it is certainly worth looking at. Anything that can help to break through the demoralising cycle of resits and offer an alternative route for young people who have not got those qualifications in the first place is worth looking at.

A better answer, though, as I alluded to in my previous answer, is to look at what we are asking of children and young people in the first place in those GCSE qualifications. I would prefer as a first step to look at English and maths GCSEs themselves and think about whether there is a better way of identifying proficiency in literacy and numeracy than those qualifications currently enable. That is not easy to do. I recognise that there are challenges in moving away from that GCSE basis for those subjects. If that proves too challenging, I think the stepping-stone approach is a useful one alongside considering other aspects of the resits policy.

Alun Francis: I don't know where to begin. I could talk all day about this, probably not satisfactorily. If I am honest, I am not a fan of the stepping stone. The first point I would make is that we need to improve English and maths outcomes before students get to 16. I think we can say that and park it. Once they have not got it at 16, it is incredibly important that we put a lot of effort into making sure that as many 19-year-olds as possible do.

I do not think the stepping stone will necessarily help for these reasons. If you are going to do the stepping-stone qualification and you do not pass it, what happens then? Do you do it again in year 2? What do you do in year 3? I am not sure it solves the problem. There may be other ways of dividing up the curriculum to teach it in chunks where students are coming in with very low attainment.

The stepping stone is not really a stepping stone, because if they come in with a grade 1 or 2 GCSE, they already have the equivalent of a level 1 qualification. I am not sure it changes that much. The real issue is: how are we going to improve the English and maths skills of young people that are coming in with fairly poor attainment? My concern here is, really, the amount of time we give to them in the curriculum, the investment in English and maths tutors, and the huge gap in pay between school English and maths tutors and college English and maths tutors.

I know that not everything is about funding—I am probably the last person to constantly raise the question of funding—but I think if we are serious about this problem then we need to stop changing the qualifications and actually invest properly. If we are going to consider a post-16 pupil premium, I wouldn't really support that, but what I would really support is a significant investment into excellent English and maths teaching, and the

extension of the 16 to 18 phase to 16 to 19 for those who need it, now you can actually have three years' funding. I think building that in for those with low English and maths right at the beginning and combining their vocational learning with their English and maths more effectively are better ways forward, if I am honest.

Manuela Perteghella: Daniel, would you like to add anything?

Daniel Lilley: I have nothing further to add on that.

Q10 **Sureena Brackenridge:** The Government have proposed changes to school accountability measures, such as Progress 8, that would cover English, maths, two sciences, two breadth subjects and two choices. Is that necessary and do you support that reform?

Daniel Lilley: That is a brilliant question. It is one of the biggest questions that comes out of the technical education at 14 announcement, where the EBacc, Attainment 8 and Progress 8 all have to, to an extent, be relitigated with this new pathway that we don't fully understand.

Our view at the Centre for Social Justice would be that the biggest issue with these measures was, as the Government said, their narrowness. If we can get technical education pathways at 14 right, that would be a very good way of addressing that while retaining what really works about them.

Take the EBacc; I know it is slightly separate, but it sits within the same design as it was implemented. If there were a TBacc as well—you retain your English, maths and science but instead of, say, history and French, you could do engineering, art and design—you could keep the rigour, ensure that there was no sense of a second rate option when it comes to breadth, and also have that wider breath.

There is an interesting opportunity here—I say that, but all those things are very difficult to do. But I do like that possibility as we reopen that question with this new announcement.

Julie McCulloch: We would welcome a move towards recognising more breadth in school performance measures—particularly the inclusion of creative subjects and of technical awards. We think there is an opportunity to go a bit further: to think about how performance measures could recognise a wider set of qualifications more generally. We think it is really important to think about the qualifications suitable for children with a wide range of special educational needs, making sure that what are really good and appropriate qualifications for that wide range of children can be included in those performance measures. We do not think they currently are as much as they could be, and that brings all sorts of perverse incentives in terms of school admissions for children with additional needs.

There is a proposal to include an additional measure for children coming into secondary schools with low prior attainment. That is a helpful and overdue recognition for schools that have a particularly high proportion of children coming in with lower prior attainment.

We think this is heading in the right direction. There are clearly additional questions about the likely move towards an even greater focus on a broader range of technical subjects pre-16 and how those are recognised, but those can be approached in the same way as some of the thinking that has already started to be done around Progress 8.

Alun Francis: I do not have a lot to add, apart from the fact that I agree with a lot of the earlier comments. We always have to be cautious when we change qualifications around dilution and lowering expectations. We have to keep our expectations high and encourage every individual to do absolutely the best that they can. When we make a lot of those kinds of changes, I am always slightly cautious about ending up inadvertently creating a high road and a low road. We have to be careful about that.

Q11 **Caroline Voaden:** I would like to talk about enrichment. The previous Government published the enrichment framework in June this year and committed to additional funding, including the "Every Child Can" programme. What else do you think is needed to deliver the Government's ambition of a strong enrichment offer, including access to sports, culture, civic engagement and—the one that I am really passionate about—outdoor learning and nature? I will start with you, Daniel.

Daniel Lilley: We were very encouraged by the framework and announcement; it is something we have called for, but I think it is fair to say that it is not as substantive as it would need to be to make the kind of change that we would like to see. We at the Centre for Social Justice are publishing some research on this in the next fortnight or so, and we pick out three things within the scope of enrichment—actually, sport is within that as well.

First, we always focus on the provision offered, and mostly what focusing on inputs means is that those children who are already sporty or in lots of enrichment activities will do more. The number of children being enriched does not change substantially unless you focus specifically on participation, so it is a question of—I know it is a cliché to say this—moving from the input to the outcome.

Secondly, it is always sad to come to this conclusion, but there is a reason why private schools do this phenomenally well and state schools do it much less well: it is really expensive. The funding pot that has been allocated and has been built just feels several times too small for the aspiration that has been outlined. On some things, we can see how much private schools spend to achieve what they manage to achieve; we can see how much money has been set aside.

That brings me to the third and final point, which is that a decision about priority has to be made in order for enrichment to be expanded so that every child can be physically active and doing other enriching activities like outdoor learning, theatre and debating. Enrichment has to move up the food chain for that to happen. It has to move up the food chain in terms of accountability measures—there are sharp edges, there are consequences, if that does not happen—and it has to move up the food chain in terms of

the resource associated with it. That will necessitate a question about what it moves up over—what it moves up in relation to. It is very hard to address this issue—because it's an expensive issue—without asking that question as well.

Caroline Voaden: It doesn't cost anything to take kids outside.

Daniel Lilley: That is true.

Julie McCulloch: A more enriched experience for children and young people is clearly a good thing, and I think it is really positive that this is receiving so much attention and policy focus. I agree with Daniel that there is an opportunity—that more could be done with this. I think it is important that enrichment does not become synonymous with extracurricular. Some of the things currently talked about in terms of enrichment really should be part of a core curricular offer, so there is something to think about there.

This does need to be done in a way that is manageable by schools, particularly those serving more deprived communities, whose pupils probably need it most. There is a danger that if schools that find this more challenging do not do as much of it as other schools, it could end up exacerbating gaps rather than closing them. That is something to be aware of. We need to be sure that it does not add to the already significant workloads of teachers and leaders. I suspect you will hear more about that from your next panel, but it could end up being counterproductive if it does that.

Daniel's points about accountability are right. How do these increased expectations on schools sit alongside performance measures, Ofsted—is there an opportunity to rebalance what we hold schools to account for, what we see as important in what schools do, and make that more holistic? If it ends up going down that route, that will be hugely beneficial.

Q12 **Caroline Voaden:** Alun, I have a huge rural constituency and one of the issues is that children cannot do after-school activities if they have to get the bus home, because there is only one bus—the school bus. Are you seeing any disparity between rural and urban areas in the provision of enrichment activities and extracurricular stuff? Have you noticed that in any of your work?

Alun Francis: We do not have specific research on that, but I am aware of a whole range of things about access and participation relating to transport in rural areas, which comes up in lots of different guises, so I think that that does reinforce your point.

I would add two points to the ones already made. Everyone can see the benefit of this broader approach to enrichment and why it would bring positive benefits, but I would emphasis two things. First, I do not think we can overestimate the extent to which young people are isolated and lonely—particularly young men. All the research is showing that because of phones and technology, young people do not have the same opportunities

for socialisation with each other—meeting friends and so on—as they did in the past. There are a range of ways in which this can support that.

That lack of socialisation has real implications for achievement and preparation for work. Employers talk about a lack of soft skills; I cannot tell you how many employers have told me that when they take a young person on a work placement and ask them to answer the phone, they will say, "Can't I just text them?" That feels a bit sad, really, because it is not something they have grown up with in their world, but it is still very important at work.

My second point is slightly more provocative. I am not sure that this is just down to the Government, schools and colleges. I will give you an example, and I have made this point lots of times before, so it will come as no surprise to people who have heard me talk in the past. We have lots of social mobility charities that will spend a lot of time taking very clever poor kids to Oxford and Cambridge to visit the university they might go to and that will give them mentoring and support to help them get there. Very little of the same kind of support would be given if you were a very disadvantaged young person growing up in Hartlepool or Knowsley, where youth services are not well funded and where there is not the same level of opportunity. Certainly, there is not the same sense of a programme that you can access that will give you a real eye-opener into a world of opportunity that is currently closed to you.

I do not have an easy answer as to what the solution to that might be, but we have the national lottery and funders who finance all kinds of charitable activities. If we really want our next generation to do well, the whole thing about focusing on their interpersonal skills, on their sociability—meeting other people—and on developing their soft skills is important. Those are massive issues and it goes beyond Government. We should all be doing a lot more around it.

Q13 **Jess Asato:** My question is about how the Government's policy on schools should tie to the national youth strategy and its proposal to introduce votes for 16 and 17-year-olds. Alan, I do not know whether you take a view on that policy, but was there anything else you wanted to add about the wider piece of how schools need to link in with either the national youth strategy or its proposal on votes at 16?

Alun Francis: I don't have a particular view on votes at 16. As for the wider youth strategy, one thing that we need to see more of is interconnectedness between different parts of Government and voluntary community sector employers, in how we work together and collaborate. Too often it feels as though we are all working alongside each other, but not with each other. That is another area where I think devolution has a strong role to play—to get that sense of local scale.

You cannot have the same answers to every problem in every area, because all the partners and stakeholders are different, and the priorities might be different. You can start to get that kind of integration at a local scale, and that is very important in helping services to join together. It is

true that the younger generation are getting a worse deal than their parents, no matter what their background, and that is an issue that we all ought to be attentive to.

Julie McCulloch: We have not done any particular work around the national youth policy or voting rights, so I do not have anything specific to say on that, but I would agree with Alun and reiterate his points about the importance of a joined-up Government and formalising looking at all of the services that affect children and their families through the lens of the child, and at what that tells us about what they need. I think we are starting to see more of it in that joined-up Government strategy, and it would be great if that continued.

Daniel Lilley: Just one short comment from me, which is very much in tune with the other comments. This is something that we have touched on in our work on physical activity and enrichment. A big part of why it has become such an issue is that the out-of-school social life of young people has thinned so much in the last generation, mostly due to external things—phones are one and infrastructure is another, but there are several others. When we think about enrichment and physical activity, the broader socialising and movement of young people, and being out and about and doing things, needs to be at least as appealing as a mobile phone and time spent on social media. If we are to focus on restricting social media, that stick must have a carrot, and that carrot must look like making the outdoor world as thrilling and exciting as it was generations ago.

Chair: Lovely. Thank you very much. It has been a really interesting discussion with all of you; we are grateful to you for taking the time to be with us. If there is anything that you wanted to say about the White Paper that you did not have the opportunity to get across today, please drop the Committee a note afterwards. We would welcome any further thoughts that you would like to feed in, but for now, I thank all three of you for being with us this afternoon.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: James Bowen, Mrs Julia Harnden, Daniel Kebede and Darren Northcott.

Chair: Welcome to the second panel in our oral evidence session on scrutiny of the Government's schools White Paper. I welcome our second panel of witnesses. I invite each of you to introduce yourselves briefly to the Committee.

Mrs Julia Harnden: Afternoon, everyone. I am Julia Harnden. I am deputy director of policy at ASCL.

Darren Northcott: I am Darren Northcott. I am the national official for education at the NASUWT.

James Bowen: Afternoon. I am James Bowen. I am the assistant general secretary at NAHT and a former primary headteacher.

Daniel Kebede: Hello there. I am Daniel Kebede. I am a former primary teacher and I am the general secretary of the National Education Union.

Q14 **Chair:** Thank you very much for being with us today. I will lead our questioning. My first question is a nice open one. In the interest of helping us to get through all our questions today, I would be grateful if you could answer it reasonably concisely. What is your general assessment of the schools White Paper, where have the Government got it right, what do you make of the subsequent changes that have come since the White Paper, and is there more work that needs to be done?

Daniel Kebede: I would like to start with what it will mean for our profession, broadly. Unless the reforms are properly funded, it will mean much more work for educators, who are already being pushed beyond their reasonable limits. We are now two years into this Government, and the lived reality of teachers and support staff has largely remained unchanged. In fact, I talk to both daily, and, if anything, they are saying it is much harder than it has even been. We still have teachers working around 50 hours a week. Stress is endemic. Too many teachers are leaving the profession—I saw your video yesterday, Caroline; it was very good.

That is the central weakness of the White Paper. It speaks very much of transformation without confronting the crisis that is already consuming the education system. We have pupil numbers falling. Budgets are very much stretched. There are restrictions on funding—schools have had 15 years of cost-cutting—and teacher numbers are declining. At the moment, professionals are being asked not to build a better system but to manage its decline. That is where the real issue is with the White Paper.

Q15 **Chair:** You set out the analysis really clearly. What specifically in the White Paper is driving those concerns—in terms of the new policies introduced by the Government that have yet to come down the track for the teaching profession, some of which will require legislation later in the year? What specifically are teachers worried about that will make their current situation worse, in your analysis?

Daniel Kebede: There is a contradiction at the heart of these reforms in the sense that schools are being asked to take on new responsibilities, as you say, for SEND, enrichment and engagement, while also having to find the funding for pay awards. We have an issue in the sense that Ministers are asking schools to do much more while providing much less. Funding is not a footnote to reform, of course; it is the condition on which reform will either succeed or fail. The real issue is the funding.

James Bowen: I will start with the positives. I think there is plenty to admire in there, in terms of the ambition. Individually, there are lots of good ideas in there. I know that we are not here to talk about the SEND side of things today, but we cannot ignore the fact that the White Paper talks about rebuilding the public services that sit around schools. School leaders have been crying out for that for years, so seeing it in black and white is encouraging.

There are other specific things in there that we have not talked about, including better mentoring and coaching for school staff, which we like, and looking again at the complaints process—we could have a conversation about that, as it is a huge issue and it is good to see it in there. Individually, there are lots of ideas in there that you look at and think, "These are in the right place and are encouraging."

I agree with a lot of what Daniel said. The big worry for us at the moment is the cumulative load that is about to fall on schools, and the scale of reform that is about to hit them in the next 18 months. Alongside the White Paper, we have the curriculum assessment review, where we will be rewriting programmes of study from scratch and rethinking the whole curriculum; we have a new Ofsted framework, and people are still getting their heads around how that operates, what we need to do and how to prepare for it; we have probably the biggest SEND reforms in a generation; the White Paper talks about enrichment and engagement frameworks; and then, of course, in the summer we have talk about changes to vocational pathways.

You look at each of those and say that there is merit and they are good ideas, but we are putting them all together and giving them to schools on top of the day job, which is not quiet—you will all have been in schools; people are not sat around twiddling their thumbs. The scale of reform is a real concern, and the implementation is a worry.

Finally, and this probably echoes Daniel's point slightly, I worry that, in places, the great ambition has not always been matched by resources. Enrichment is a really good example of that. We could talk about that in more depth. We would all support the ambition, and there is plenty we can do with enrichment, but if we are genuinely talking about a wraparound programme of after-school provision, we cannot have that for free—we need people to provide it. There are some conversations to have about that.

Darren Northcott: I would support everything that my colleagues have said. Just to make a couple of additional points, and to pick up where James left off on the cumulative load, one thing that concerns teachers and leaders is that, when looking at Government policy and proposals, particularly the whole range of issues set out in the schools White Paper, there seems to be an inherent assumption that schools have a vast amount of unused capacity that we will fill with these policies. The opposite is the case, and that is the real risk here.

As James said, some of the ideas set out in the White Paper are positive. One thing to focus on is that this Government have understood—as I think the earlier discussion reflected— that you must have effective connections and multi-agency working across the children and young people sector. You have to get the health services, youth and community services and schools working together and collaborating. That is really recognised in the White Paper, which should be acknowledged. But you cannot build multi-agency structures on the cheap, with no resources, so that lack of

investment is a real concern. The investment needs to be there in order to ensure that some very worthwhile objectives are achieved in practice.

Mrs Julia Harnden: I cannot disagree with anything my colleagues have said, but I will add a couple of points. Broadly speaking, we welcome the ambition of the White Paper, but our concerns lie around the expectation and sheer volume of change. Our members are telling us that there are two key questions: will there be enough resource to enable us to achieve, and where will we find the time and capacity to meet these new expectations?

Our members have told us that workforce issues are by far the most significant cross-cutting theme of all the elements, although we welcome the ambition and many of the proposals included in the White Paper. Their broader concerns around workforce are retention, salary competitiveness, and the cumulative impact of multiple overlapping issues, which colleagues have made a point about really well.

More specifically, their concerns are about increasing workload pressures, and those are twofold: led perhaps directly by schools absorbing diminishing public services but perhaps indirectly where we have had partially or unfunded pay awards. There is a knock-on effect there, particularly for leaders, who are then picking up even more workload as schools are not in a position to create the capacity they would like to.

Q16 **Caroline Voaden:** James, I will start with you. In your written evidence you said that you were disappointed by the lack of ambition in the White Paper in making teaching "an attractive and sustainable career proposition." Daniel referred just now to some research I did recently which showed that 47% or 48% of teachers are considering leaving within the next five years, which is a real crisis. I know we will talk about recruitment in a minute, but I want to focus on retention. Starting with James, then going to the others: what do you want to see the Government do to address retention? What do you think the major issue is? I know what I have seen from my research.

James Bowen: Very quickly, we have been grappling with this issue of recruitment and retention for a long time, and various Governments have tried to fix it. If you look at the White Paper, there are lots of sensible things: expanding maternity pay and other ideas, such as improving CPD—not a bad idea. But I have never met a school leader or a teacher who says to me, "I'm leaving the profession because my CPD's not good enough." That is not what they are telling us; that is not the problem.

That is not to say improving CPD is a bad idea—it is a very good one. There are a list of things the paper is talking about, like helping teachers harness AI—a really good idea. There are lots of good things in there. But I think all along we have failed to address the fundamental problems. Time and again, when we speak to our members and teachers and ask, "What is it that's driving you out of the profession?" They will say, "It's the crushing accountability regime, where I don't think I can win, and despite me doing

my very best, they're going to come and hit me with a big stick and they're going to publicly name me and shame me."

They are not against accountability, but they say, "It's not worth it." We have members every single week phoning our helpline saying, "I'm going, and I'm going because of Ofsted." We need to fix that. That is not to say we should not have inspection, but we need a much fairer and more proportionate system. So that is one thing.

The second is workload. We obviously represent school leaders, and so many people say, "I cannot do this job and be a good parent." I had that experience myself: one of the reasons I left headship—it was not the only one, and I had a wonderful opportunity at NAHT—was that we had a young child, and I thought, "I can't do both of these well. I can choose one or the other." Because if I was going to be in school working Sunday night, Saturday mornings, as I was, to keep on top of things, I could not be a parent. So many people say that. We have to grapple with that workforce side of things.

Caroline Voaden: But come on, you get six weeks' holiday.

James Bowen: Yes, well, we are all sat around doing nothing, right? A fair chunk of those holidays was certainly spent in school preparing. I took that in the spirit it was intended, but I think those core issues are what we have to grapple with. I genuinely think that if we could fix that kind of accountability pressure, we would retain so many more school leaders. It would not make the job easy—blimey, there are enough pressures as it is—but we would retain so many more.

Q17 **Caroline Voaden:** In terms of workload, what do you think would make the difference to classroom teachers? Maybe not leaders, because that is probably a bit different.

James Bowen: Daniel will probably want to come in on that one as well. There is an opportunity in the age of AI, but we must be very careful with that, because there are huge risks as well. An awful lot of teachers' time is spent on planning and marking, which takes a lot of time, particularly if you have five or six classes a day, 34 children in a class and you have to mark their books. There are some opportunities to harness technology, but we have got to be very careful with that; there is a whole issue around ethics and how we do it.

Again, ultimately it comes down to whether we have suitable class sizes—have you got the right number of kids in your class and the right number of books to mark? Have we got a system that is set up to allow you to succeed in that way? Daniel will probably want to come in on that.

The other thing is that when we ask teachers about workload, their evidence always talks about administrative tasks—a lot of form-filling. We need to keep cracking and working at that. What is it? What are these administrative tasks that mean we are doing all this form-filling?

Q18 **Caroline Voaden:** Who is reading those forms?

James Bowen: It is probably having very little impact. Again, the SEND system is not up for debate here, but a lot of time is spent providing evidence, filling in forms and demonstrating or pleading a case to try to get support, rather than actually getting the support you need. The conversation on workload is probably about a seven-hour one. My plea to Government is to double down on it and find solutions. The profession is desperate to work with the Government to find those solutions.

Daniel Kebede: James is absolutely correct and I agree with much of it. I will just make some additions. The big problem at the moment is that teaching is not a profession that is compatible with family, if you are working in excess of 50 hours a week. It is not just the bureaucratic, administrative tasks that take up your time. Our members are talking very clearly to us about the No. 1 issue for them at the moment. It is not just the hours they spend, but the intensity of the workload they currently have to endure. We have rising pupil need and some of the largest class sizes in Europe, with 1 million children being taught in class sizes of 31 or more, which is making the day really intense. In addition to that, we have chaos in the system, which is being driven by restrictions on school funding, a decline in pupil roll and fewer teachers in the system. That is leading to chaos: redundancies, restructures and, at times, school closures.

This Government need to be much more ambitious and to provide the funding required to make the White Paper successful. They must go further on things like maternity—obviously it is welcome to see the shift in that, but the fact of the matter is that the DFE civil servants administering the education system have far better maternity pay at 26 weeks than the people on the ground delivering it. These things really need to change. The Government must recognise that education is a gendered profession and invest in its workforce. Fundamentally, we need to use the decline in pupil roll as an opportunity to bring class sizes down to the European average. That will make a meaningful difference to the lives of teachers and support staff.

Mrs Julia Harnden: We would really like to see a situation where education is firmly considered by everyone as a pillar of economic growth. If and when that is the case, we feel that we will naturally get better funding for it, be able to restore pay competitiveness and hopefully be in a world where teachers and leaders do not have to work more than 55 hours a week. We recently did our own survey on wellbeing and workload, where they told us that external pressures are leading to overwhelm, and that the two most significant actions that the Government could take are around accountability reform and adequate and stable funding.

Darren Northcott: My colleagues have made a clear case for why we have continuing issues around teacher retention. To add another point, a lot of data says that pupil behaviour is a big driver of exit from the profession—we must not ignore that.

On workload, the points around investment and the link between investment in the education system and workload are well made. To pick

up on your point, there are also issues around whether teachers are doing things that raise standards and provide high-quality learning experiences for children and young people—are they doing things that focus on their core responsibilities for teaching and learning? We still see marking, planning and assessment practices in schools that are perhaps more driven by concern about accountability than by evidence about what works and helps pupils to make progress. Thinking about how teachers are spending their time and what they are directed towards in their professional activities is also an important part of the piece.

Q19 **Manuela Perteghella:** The Government have committed to recruiting 6,500 teachers for specialist subjects at secondary schools and for SEND across all schools. Is that sufficiently ambitious for teacher recruitment? We will start with Julia.

Mrs Julia Harnden: We think it is not. We think that we should look beyond the current recruitment targets. It is really helpful to have a clearer understanding now of where those targets will be focused, but there is another strand to this discussion, as we talk more about devolution—Julie McCulloch mentioned it in the previous panel. We need to be clear about how our recruitment targets will work in the context of more strategic authorities, looking at 14-to-19 pathways and so on.

We do not think the targets are ambitious enough. There are green shoots, in terms of ITT, but there is a long way to go yet. It is really important that, at this early stage, we reassess those and think about what they look like in the devolution landscape.

Darren Northcott: Just to add to that, the 6,500 figure has been bandied around for quite some time, but there is some confusion about what it means. You talked about recruitment, and a lot of people have understood it as recruitment, but the definition in the White Paper is pretty clear: it is an increase in the overall stock of teachers, compared with the 2023-24 baseline, and it does not include primary for reasons that I still do not understand. In many respects, it also does not acknowledge the decade and a half of challenge that the system has faced, in terms of addressing those recruitment issues.

It is not clear where the 6,500 figure comes from. What calculations led to it? There is more that we need from the Government on the sums that it did there. I am not sure it is enough. Research undertaken by the National Audit Office said that FE alone would need between 8,000 and 12,000 additional teachers to address rising student numbers. The figure certainly is not ambitious enough, and it is still not entirely clear what it means and what it does not mean.

James Bowen: In terms of the statistics and numbers, colleagues have said it really well. If we had 6,500 more teachers in the system, great. That is positive, but we need to go beyond that.

There is a broader question. Rather than just talking about whether it is 6,000, 7,000 or 8,000, the next question needs to be: what are we trying

to achieve here? What is the goal of having more teachers in the system? We all remember when we had the limit on class sizes in key stage 1. That is the kind of thing that we should be talking about. We should be talking about what class sizes should look like in secondary and how we put the numbers in place to achieve that. We should be talking about the number of specialist teachers we need. We were talking earlier about the reforms in vocational and technical. What do we need to deliver that?

I am less interested in the big, raw figures. Colleagues have made their points really well, but we really need to ask what we want the education system to do. What are we trying to achieve, and how many teachers do we need to achieve that goal?

To link back to the previous question, my second point is that getting more teachers in at one end is all well and good, but we have to hold on to them. There is a leaky pipeline if we are not careful. We will get more in at one end—that is good news—but we will still be losing people. A third of teachers leave within five years, and if we carry on with that attrition rate we will be constantly trying to fill the leaky bucket, so we must not lose sight of the fact that we have to focus on retention as much as on trying to get more in at the other end.

Daniel Kebede: It is my view that, on the 6,500 teachers pledge, the Government has been misleading the public. An additional 6,500 teachers would of course be welcome, but it is my view that the target is neither broad enough nor sufficient to meet the crisis facing our schools. The Government says that it has been making progress—I think it says that there are 4,600 additional teachers on its chosen measure—yet we all know that the total number of teachers fell last year by 1,900. In nursery and primary schools alone, the workforce fell by 2,900. That exposes the problem with the pledge: primary teachers have been excluded from the target, precisely when the largest fall in teachers has occurred in primary education. Just keeping the same number of teachers in the system as pupil numbers fall would be a good opportunity to bring down class sizes, but of course that requires a credible workforce strategy.

Q20 **Chair:** Can I ask about the challenge of pupil numbers? You have mentioned variously the enormous pressure on the FE sector because it is at the peak of the bulge in pupil numbers that has made its way through primary and secondary and is now into FE; universities will have that and then have the drop-off as well. We have that catastrophic drop-off. There are schools in my local area that have 12 or 15 pupils in reception. That is going to come all the way through. I entirely understand the point about wanting good class sizes that enable teachers to deliver a good education for every child in the class; 12 children in a primary school year group does not make for a viable school.

Do you have reflections on the challenge of recruitment and retention? I think that we should always say recruitment and retention together because there is no point in recruitment if you are just losing bigger numbers out of the system altogether. How should the system and the Government approach the quite extreme challenge of a bulge making its

way through and, coming out the other end of that, a catastrophic drop in the number of children entering the education system?

Darren Northcott: My colleagues will probably want to come in on that. One thing to say is that this is not the first time that our system has experienced falls in pupil numbers—there is a demographic wave and we all know how that works—but the policy decision taken at that time was to see it as an opportunity to enhance the quality of provision rather than to cut investment in the system or to not allow the quality of education to be improved by using the space created by the falling rolls to support pupils' learning. I know that we are not specifically looking at SEND here, but we are confronted by a series of proposals on SEND that are going to place significant additional responsibilities on mainstream schools. Falling rolls may, in some respects, create an opportunity to ensure that mainstream schools can tailor and personalise provision to the needs of children with additional needs. Yes, it creates challenges but it also creates really significant opportunities. If we thought about how those resources could be utilised across the system, I think that would help to address many of the problems that we are talking about today.

Daniel Kebede: The situation at the moment is that teacher numbers are falling at the same rate that pupil numbers are falling. That has actually never happened before and it is creating chaos in the system around mergers, restructures, redundancies and school closures. When Thatcher and Callaghan were faced with a declining pupil roll, teacher numbers dropped at a much lower rate. Actually Tony Blair—"education, education, education"—when he was Prime Minister, was also faced with declining pupil numbers and he increased the amount of teachers. That gave them the opportunity to reduce class sizes. I think we have a bit of an issue here because Government have talked about the 6,500 extra expert teachers and that is what the public expect. When those aspirations are put out in the public domain and then not met, that is when the public lose their faith in politicians and in Government. We absolutely need to ensure that we meet that pledge by getting more teachers in the classrooms, but to do that we need to make teaching a profession compatible with family life.

Mrs Julia Harnden: On the point about falling rolls, I would start with what we cannot do. We cannot have money disappearing out of the system, so how do we stop that? By looking at the distribution methodology, because at the moment it is so heavily pupil led. That is what is causing situations where there are only 12 children and the school is not receiving enough money to deliver an education to that number of children in that class.

It would be worth considering different ways of distributing the money that is available and perhaps look more seriously at class costs and school costs. Some 90% of distribution is pupil led, and clearly that suggests that we are going to lose money. We have a really clear position that that cannot happen. We may need to redirect some of the money to address some of the other significant issues but we could look at the distribution

methodology to see how we could work to make sure that education in the classroom does not become reductive simply because of the falling rolls.

James Bowen: Just to pick up on that, linking back to another part of the White Paper that we were discussing earlier and this concept of thinking about how we potentially redistribute funding and skew it more towards disadvantaged schools: doing that in this context is incredibly risky and the Government need to be really mindful of that. When we are talking about schools like those you mentioned, if there is a small rural school which has a class of 12, 15 or 16—

Chair: It is happening in urban areas.

James Bowen: Exactly, it is happening in urban areas as well. They are struggling to make that work. Our system is very heavily based on per pupil funding—as you have said. If, with good intentions, we start messing with the formula to say that we need to direct that funding more, then we create losers as well as winners. I think there are words of caution and warning to be said about how those two things interrelate.

Q21 **Manuela Perteghella:** On that point, we heard about rural inequalities and geographical disparities. In your view, what measures are needed to get teachers and head teachers to move to and stay working in disadvantaged areas or schools with low attainment wherever they are?

James Bowen: One of the things that we have to recognise is that, on the whole, teachers do not tend to move around the country. That is mainly because you do not need to. There will be schools local to where you live. I do not need to uproot my family and move to the north of England. We have to be cognisant of that reality. Every time previous Governments have tried to move people about geographically it has not worked, primarily for the reason that people do not need to move around in that way. However, we need to attract people who are nearby to go and work in schools serving those disadvantaged communities and to choose them over other schools that maybe have not got such disadvantaged communities.

The problem with the way the system is set up at the moment is that that is a risky decision to make, particularly for a school leader, because you are going into a school where the accountability system at the moment is kind of rigged against you. We have data on the new Ofsted framework showing that if you serve a more disadvantaged community, you are far more likely to get a lower grade in areas for achievement—then you are facing Ofsted monitoring and what have you. At the moment, there are so many disincentives to go and work in the schools serving the most disadvantaged communities and in the toughest places.

People have to make that decision despite the system working against you. We need to change that and have a system where that is the easy and right choice. That is not about the financial side because people do not come into teaching to make money. It is not about saying that we will give you £5,000 more here; it is about giving you a fair crack of the whip. It is

about knowing going in that the risk you take working there does not mean that you are going to be hammered by the accountability system and have your job on the line in two years because you have not done things quite quick enough.

I have a final point—and you can tell that I feel quite passionate about this. If I were to go back into headship tomorrow and had two schools in front of me on a piece of paper, and at one the results are in a nice place and the community it is serving is relatively mixed and what have you, and the other is in a disadvantaged community where I would be up against it and would struggle to recruit teachers, then to choose that second one is a really risky and brave decision for me to take as a professional. That should not be the case. I want to work in that school—that is why I came into teaching in the first place. However, let's have it so that I do not get penalised for making that decision. There are lots of things we can do around that.

Q22 **Manuela Perteghella:** Does anyone else have anything to add on this?

Mrs Julia Harnden: It was really pleasing to see retention incentives for heads in disadvantaged areas come through as one of the proposals. However, in terms of how that is being delivered, it is unfortunate that it is not being done via the pay framework. I agree with what James said about how it is not about the financial aspect—but then it sort of is in a way. Again, if the distribution of funding were such that there was sufficient in those particular areas for the trust board or the governing board to be able to make good decisions about retaining its leaders so that it can develop those leadership skills over time, that would be better. That is what is not happening at the moment. I think that would be a way, at least, of contributing to getting some sustainable leadership in those areas which we need so badly.

Chair: Just before Manuela continues, we are at the point where we are going to have to pick up the pace quite a lot in order to ask you about all of the topics that we would like to get your views on. I ask witnesses to be concise and members of the Committee—and I am also guilty—to limit your supplementary questions as well. We will then get through as much as we can by about 4.30 pm.

Q23 **Manuela Perteghella:** My next question is about the move to a trust-led system. The Government have said that they want all schools to either join or form high-quality school trusts to put collaboration at the heart of the system. What is your view on those proposals?

Daniel Kebede: The first thing to say is that collaboration does not require academisation. We as a union obviously strongly believe in schools working together, sharing their expertise and accepting collective responsibility for every child in their community, but there is no evidence at all that converting every school into an academy is the best or only route to achieving that.

James Bowen: I agree with a lot of what Daniel said. We have members who work in multi-academy trusts who think they are fantastic; they really

enjoy being a part of that partnership, and it works well for them. Equally, we have school leaders working in local authorities where they collaborate and have local clusters, and that works incredibly well for them.

The point the Government really need to consider is that, when I speak to school leaders and schools who work in a local authority and that works well for them, they say, "There is no compelling reason for me to move. The outcomes for children are good, and we are working well with the local authority. I like the relationship: they are supportive, but they hold me to account. The school is performing well: I have a good Ofsted rating, and I have good numbers on roll." Given everything we said earlier about the cumulative load, their priority will not be rethinking governance structures and joining a MAT. That is not to say, "MATs bad and LAs good"—we have members working across both—but a lot of our members who are not in MATs say, "With everything else going on, if it's not broken, don't start meddling."

Darren Northcott: There is no evidence that they raise standards. A lot of the Government's policy agenda is about collaboration, but that will have to take place by looking over the walls of the MAT where there are different structures in place, and at how you can get collaboration between different schools when one of the key foci of collaboration between schools is the MAT system.

There are absolutely MATs that are doing an excellent job, and there are staff in them who are also doing a good job, but one of the key issues is the lack of transparency in some multi-academy trusts about how decisions are taken. In some multi-academy trusts, there is an awful lot of power and not very much accountability. There is a school funding formula that is focused on individual schools, and we see some individual MATs collecting all that money and distributing it as they see fit, and they are not accountable for those decisions. Accountability and transparency are key weaknesses in much of the multi-academy trust system we have today.

Mrs Julia Harnden: ASCL are supportive of schools working in strong collaborative groups. One of the key points that has come from our members in looking at this policy is the importance of clarity of role between schools, trusts and local authorities, which could also create their own trusts. An additional point is that our members have said that it looks as if collaboration will be a central mechanism in delivering some of the expectations from the White Paper—maybe not explicitly, but implicitly, thinking about SEND reforms and system leadership. If we pursue this, it is incumbent on Government to think really carefully about how those collaborative structures are co-constructed.

Daniel Kebede: I would like to add that I think the workforce evidence should make the Committee quite cautious about moving to a more trust-led system. Our analysis of the school workforce census and freedom of information data found that one in five teachers left their jobs in some of the largest multi-academy trusts in a single year, compared with one in seven for maintained schools. In some of the really large trusts, more than

a quarter of teachers left in a single year. If you had a system running like that, where a quarter of teachers were leaving a school, it would completely grind to a halt.

Q24 **Sureena Brackenridge:** Having considered the White Paper, what measures are needed to close the disadvantage gap? That is a short question, but the answer is huge, so I would appreciate your brevity and precision.

Mrs Julia Harnden: These are deeply entrenched issues, so we would say that there will not be a quick fix. In terms of some of the place-based proposals, that will allow policy to specifically support schools and leaders in those particular geographical areas—that might be, for example, delaying the school's inspection window to give time for training and support to embed in a school.

I will focus a bit on funding, if that is alright, because that is my area of expertise within the organisation. We think that there are some very blunt instruments at the moment around supporting disadvantage. Therefore, if we were to look more broadly at how we funded schools to support disadvantage, that would perhaps then enable them to be the masters of their own success in terms of the disadvantage gap. Geography makes a difference, but within that, there will be areas of high deprivation, which will lead to the disadvantage gap being perhaps broader in some of those areas. There are funding things that we can do.

There is a lot of talk about reviewing the pupil premium strategy, and proposals around interventions on the pupil premium strategy where schools are not performing as well as they might be. I think we have got to be really careful about that. We are urging caution in that. We would welcome support, but schools would need to be really clear that interventions being put in place were an opportunity and not a punitive action, because we think that is counterproductive to closing the gap.

Darren Northcott: The best way in which we can stop disadvantage impacting adversely on children and young people's life chances is to have fewer children facing poverty and disadvantage in the first place, and that is about the Government's economic, social and welfare policy, which are complex issues.

One feature of effective practice that we have seen in policy in the past was the team around the child, which I think was lost between 2010 and 2024. If we have children who have vulnerabilities and susceptibility, school has an important role to play, but it is also about joining up with those other services—they also face challenges in terms of investment—such as health services, social care services, youth and community services, and having structures that allow those services to collaborate and work together. We know from policies such as Sure Start under the previous Labour Government in the 2000s that those policies can have a positive impact on disadvantaged children and young people.

Sureena Brackenridge: May I include support staff in schools as well?

Darren Northcott: Absolutely, yes.

James Bowen: I absolutely support that. Tackling child poverty and focusing on the early years is probably one of the nearest things we have to a silver bullet in this.

The other nearest thing to a silver bullet is the quality of teaching and learning that goes on. That is the thing that has the biggest impact in terms of closing that disadvantage gap in school—having that brilliant teacher in school. What we therefore need to do is to allow schools to focus on that.

To go back to my earlier comment, I am worried that what we are about to ask schools to do is to focus on developing an enrichment programme, and on an engagement programme, and on this. That's nice, but we have to be really careful that we are not asking schools to focus on so many things that they can't focus on the core teaching and learning.

Q25 **Sureena Brackenridge:** My question is about impacting on the disadvantage gap.

James Bowen: You do that through high-quality teaching and learning. All the evidence says that the best way you close that gap is to have brilliant teaching—high-quality teaching and learning going on.

We need to allow schools to focus on that, because that is what the evidence says closes the gap—

Q26 **Sureena Brackenridge:** Okay. Would you say that that is possible with the current curriculum and assessments?

James Bowen: The curriculum is overloaded at the moment. In terms of the curriculum, my big plea would be that we look a bit more boldly and ambitiously in terms of reducing curriculum content. We talked about how the curriculum and assessment review said let's reduce a little bit. I am slightly worried that it has not gone far enough. We are about to load more in, aren't we, because we are about to load citizenship in.

I would like this Government to have another look at the content of the curriculum, because you are right: an over-stuffed curriculum is part of the problem.

To go back to my previous point on getting brilliant teaching and learning going on if we want to close the disadvantage gap, we also need to make sure that the best leaders and the best teachers go and work in those schools serving disadvantaged communities. As I said earlier, the system doesn't encourage that at the moment.

I have a little anecdote. I was speaking to two people over the summer—one of them was working in a school serving a really disadvantaged community. They advertised for maths teachers; they couldn't get them. They were struggling. They were trying to get overseas teachers. I am not saying that was poor quality, but they were really struggling to get them.

And I was speaking to a school about half an hour away; it was a different sort of community. They had a queue of people wanting that job.

We need to flip that. We need to make it so that teachers are desperate to go and work in those schools, and that they come into the profession because they want to work with those pupils. We want to close that disadvantage gap. Let's get the best teachers working with those pupils, but let's not penalise them for doing so. Let us make that the right choice.

Q27 **Caroline Voaden:** I am not sure how quickly you will be able to answer this: what changes would you wish to see in how disadvantage funding is distributed? We know there is quite a discrepancy in funding between areas. I will start with you, Daniel.

Daniel Kebede: I would like to see reform to the national funding formula. More weight should be placed on additional need and deprivation, but that needs to be achieved through additional investment, not by taking money from one underfunded school to give to another. Our aspiration should be to level up all children and not redistribute scarcity

James Bowen: I would agree with that. It is not about rearranging existing money so that we have winners and losers. It is about investing more in those schools and disadvantaged communities. Look at the pupil premium. I would credit this Government with increasing the pupil premium in the last few years, but that was after a 10-year freeze in pupil premium where it moved by about £2 in the space of eight or nine years. We are still catching up with that. We should look at things like pupil premium, ensure there are genuine real-terms increases, and target the money at disadvantaged children and not rob Peter to pay Paul, moving it around the system.

Q28 **Caroline Voaden:** It is about how you measure disadvantage, isn't it? Some disadvantage is hidden. You say that areas do not get the money that they require because the disadvantage is averaged out.

Daniel Kebede: But then we should transition how we measure disadvantage. It is not solely on free school meal eligibility, but parental income.

Darren Northcott: You can understand why that has been used in the funding formula in the past, because it is straightforward as a proxy and there is some merit to it, but it does distort and, as was mentioned in the previous session, there are lots of families living in genuine poverty whose circumstances are not captured by that current framework.

Moving to a different system is complex. This is riven with trade-offs—of course it is. But that fundamental point that we should not focus disproportionately on the funding formula without thinking about the overall level of investment in the education system is a good point. How the system distributes funding according to the levels of disadvantage it identifies is of course legitimate, and there is probably a good case for looking, as Daniel says, at maybe moving away from a strict free school meals indicator.

Mrs Julia Harnden: I would agree with moving away from free school meals and looking at things like persistent absence, low prior attainment, which is already being looked at, as well as adverse child experience and family experience. Our members tell us that often it is the teacher in the classroom that has the best understanding of those things. So if you have to move to a system where you look towards school-based disadvantage funding rather than being heavily pupil-led, it gives a little more flexibility for those that have the best experience of the need to deliver it. But I completely agree it needs to be additional and not moving the existing pot about.

Q29 **Jess Asato:** The new Government have proposed strengthening technical education pathways alongside greater devolution, increased work experience and stronger ties with local employers. What is your response to those announcements?

Darren Northcott: A good case was made for looking at the role that technical education plays in the education system, particularly in the school system, so we need to look at that. The thing I was struck by was the lack of detail, so we need to see more detail about what is proposed. The last time something like this was genuinely attempted was following the publication of the Tomlinson review in 2004. The Government did not accept all of Tomlinson, but got to the same place by a different route. It lost the election in 2010, so it could not pursue that policy. It was incredibly complex. To try and achieve those worthwhile objectives that we think the Government wants to achieve was not something that could be done just by tinkering with a performance indicator for schools and maybe moving a little bit of the curriculum here and there. It was a fundamental reform that that last Labour Government planned and then began to implement, so this is really complex stuff.

One theme across many of the answers we have given here today is that that cannot be done on the cheap. You have a system that is already struggling. It is about to face a curriculum and assessment review—which, by the way, was done with no reference to this announcement at all, so how are those two things going to join up? Yes, it is worth while, but yes, it takes time. It needs a plan, and it also needs to be built upon the voices of those teachers, leaders and young people who learn in that system and work in that system, so it is a big task, and it is not as straightforward as perhaps it has sometimes been portrayed.

James Bowen: I would just echo that point. Broadly, it seems like a good idea, but the lack of detail is the tricky thing at the moment. We are largely working effectively off a press release, and we need to get to that detail. For me, the big thing around that is workforce; the workforce implications are huge, and that will take time. I think there is a link to the White Paper there again, around workforce, but "What does that need in terms of people to deliver it, and what does that look like?" is going to be a big part of that question.

Daniel Kebede: We have real questions around workforce—who is going to teach?—but there is also a question around parity in terms of how

vocational qualifications are measured. Unless they are put on an equal footing to academic ones, then regardless of what speeches say, they will be treated as second class.

Mrs Julia Harnden: We absolutely back the ambition for parity of qualification. We need more detail; we would like to see more detail, although it is very early days. The real test for us at this point will be some safeguards or guardrails across the system, so that it does not become a postcode lottery—so that your local offer, if you like, is not determined by where you live.

Just to pick up and reinforce a point that a colleague on the earlier panel made, we all need to be really careful that the conversations around English and maths resits and the 14 to 19 curriculum do not become conflated in the public consciousness, because one is not to solve the other. I think that is something we all need to be mindful of.

Q30 **Caroline Voaden:** The White Paper places emphasis on enrichment for all pupils. From the perspective of your members, what measures are needed to make this enrichment a reality? I think I know what Daniel might say, but we will start with Julia.

Mrs Julia Harnden: Are you sure you do not want to start with James? No, I am very happy to take this.

Obviously, all our members are absolutely for enrichment; nobody needs convincing on that. Where we have serious concerns about the proposals is where they become statutory, and without significant investment to enable them to happen. While we can see why changing non-statutory guidance or adjustments would be really helpful, we are worried that this becomes a sort of accountability by the back door—or not even by the back door, really.

Darren Northcott: One additional point, which again came up in the earlier session and I think was well made, was that yes, you can hold schools to account for their enrichment offers, but you have to make sure you are investing in it. We are kind of in a position now where it is not really being invested in, but schools are being held accountable, in terms of the inclusion of enrichment in the Ofsted inspection framework and also this tendency we increasingly see in government—not just this Government, but its predecessor—towards government by expectation.

What the Government has said about the enrichment framework it has published is, "We expect you to implement it. We are not telling you to implement it; we are expecting you to implement it." That is ambiguous, and in most schools, it is being interpreted as "You are telling us to do this, and if we do not do it, adverse consequences for us will follow." Not only do we not have the investment, we also have the investment aligned with accountability that I think schools are really worried about.

James Bowen: What we really have to hold on to here is that we have to distinguish between enrichment during the school day and extracurricular enrichment. I think that is so central to this. If we are talking about

enrichment during the school day, I am reasonably relaxed, in the sense that schools up and down the country already do outdoor learning, author visits, trips to the theatre, creative arts days, days off timetable—the list is as long as your arm in terms of enrichment. If we want to talk a bit more about trying to do that a bit more systematically, I don't mind that conversation; I think that's an interesting one.

When we are talking, though, about providing a programme of after-school, out-of-school enrichment, that is a completely different kettle of fish, because you need someone to organise that; you need people to turn up and put that on. Who is going to do that? After school, teachers have staff meetings; leaders have parent meetings. They cannot do it, nor can we expect them to do it contractually. The answer might be, "Well, we'll get partners, we'll get clubs, to do it," but someone still has to organise that. If the ambition is genuinely wraparound enrichment, after school, which I do not disagree with—it is a great ambition—you have to resource it. We go back to the extended schools era of many years ago. You have to have people to co-ordinate that. You have to have people on the ground to run the clubs and what have you. I know this is a recurring theme, but you cannot do that for free; someone is going to want to be paid to do that. We cannot expect existing school staff to do that. That would be a huge extension of their job.

Q31 **Chair:** Do you think there is a question about how, for the purposes of accountability and Ofsted, enrichment is captured and looked at?

James Bowen: Yes.

Q32 **Chair:** I can think of local authority primary schools in deprived areas of my constituency that have an absolutely brilliant programme. One in particular has an absolutely brilliant programme of enrichment that runs throughout the school day and throughout the school year. For a whole year, every child gets to swim; every child gets to play an instrument. All these opportunities are delivered within the curtilage of the school day and within resources that are at least as stretched as they are in any other school in a deprived urban area of the country.

That begs the question: are we talking about extending this and making sure that what happens in the best places at the moment happens everywhere, or are we talking about an over and above requirement—something that schools are not currently required to do at all but that the Government are now going to be requiring them to do? There is a difference between those two things.

James Bowen: I will try to answer that quickly. It's a "Yes, but". Broadly speaking, yes, I have no problem with inspectors saying to school leaders and their staff, "What do you do to enrich your curriculum?", and school leaders talking about stuff: "Actually, every child learns a musical instrument here." That is a healthy conversation about how you bring your curriculum to life, how you enrich it. I think that is fine.

The "but" is that we have to recognise that not all schools have the same resources—for all sorts of reasons. Expecting the school that you described

earlier, with just 12 kids, to put on the same provision as the big school that has 500 children is unfair, so we have to be mindful of context and budget. And absolutely no to Ofsted judging your extracurricular stuff—coming in and saying, "Well, you can't be at the expected standard, because you are running only five after-school clubs and they are running seven after-school clubs." For me, that goes way beyond what is acceptable and reasonable.

Daniel Kebede: I agree with lots of what has been said. First, I don't think there is anybody—I have never met a teacher or support staff person, a colleague, who opposes the idea of enrichment. Everybody in this room, I am sure, wants young people to have access to culture, music and so on. We all want that. But the reality at the minute is that two thirds of our members are telling us that their schools are having to fundraise to supplement their budgets. So what you are going to end up with—I think this is where James's point about Ofsted is really important—is schools in the affluent areas, which can do fundraising off fairly affluent parents, having a better offer than schools in the deprived areas. And Ofsted are going to be measuring schools on it this month. If it is going to be part of the accountability measure, it has to come with the appropriate funding, and frankly that is not happening at the moment.

Q33 **Manuela Perteghella:** The Government have said that they want to ensure that all pupils feel a sense of belonging at school. How do you build that sense of belonging, and if it is missing, how do you create it?

Daniel Kebede: I don't think belonging is something that is vague, but I also am not sure it can be created by another framework. For me, belonging is a staffing question, if we're being honest. It means that there are enough adults in the school, who know every child, that class sizes are small enough for people to notice when something changes and that teachers and support staff remain there beyond one year to sustain lasting, trusted relationships. This is a really important question because pupils who said that they felt that they did not belong in school went on to achieve, I think, roughly a grade lower at GCSE. Again, I think it relates to investment, appropriate staffing levels and appropriate support for schools.

James Bowen: I would not add too much to that. This is about relationships, isn't it? Those of us who had a positive school experience will probably think about a teacher or teachers whom we had a really close relationship with—someone who looked out for us, who was there for our entire schooling, who had the time to talk with us after school. That relationship is absolutely at the heart of it.

Darren Northcott: I suspect one thing that will worry teachers and leaders, notwithstanding how important they know belonging to be, is that something as complex as a concept of belonging and what that means is going to be reduced to two or three quantitative performance indicators against which you will be judged. We know what that leads to. It leads to all kinds of pressures to do certain things and not do other things in order

to meet those expectations. Belonging is really important, but we need real caution about how we think we are going to measure that.

James Bowen: Yes. Please no belonging league tables. That would drive the wrong behaviour.

Mrs Julia Harnden: It is about looking at it in the round, isn't it? Belonging, engagement and attendance are inextricably linked. If we are looking at a system whereby schools have good support around them, so that schools have confidence that families are being supported—to go back to one of the points I made earlier, workload pressures are quite often driven by diminished local services. I think there is something about rewinding that, and that having a positive impact on belonging, attendance and engagement.

Chair: Thank you very much. I know there are topics that we have not been able to cover today. We have had a good, detailed look at some things; we have had a canter through some of the topics. I know that all of you have access to really rich seams of information through your members, so if there are things that we have not been able to cover, please do write to us afterwards. We would very much welcome that as we get going; this is the first session in what is quite a significant inquiry for us this autumn. Thank you all very much indeed for being with us today.