



Select Committee on Youth Unemployment

Corrected oral evidence: Youth unemployment

Tuesday 23 March 2021

11.35 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Shipley (The Chair); Lord Baker of Dorking; Baroness Clark of Kilwinning; Lord Clarke of Nottingham; Lord Davies of Oldham; The Lord Bishop of Derby; Lord Empey; Lord Hall of Birkenhead; Lord Layard; Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall; Baroness Newlove; Lord Storey.

Evidence Session No. 3 Virtual Proceeding

Questions 28 - 35

Witnesses

I: Mark Cameron, CEO-Designate, The 5% Club; Jane Gratton, Head of People Policy, British Chambers of Commerce; Lauren Roberts, Youth Engagement Executive, City and Guilds Group.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Mark Cameron, Jane Gratton and Lauren Roberts.

Q28 The Chair: Welcome to this evidence session of the Select Committee on Youth Unemployment. The meeting is being broadcast via the parliamentary website, and a transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the committee website. Participants will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary. Could I just remind the committee and participants that at noon we shall have a minute's silence?

I welcome our three witnesses from business and industry. Could I just ask you to say, very briefly, who you are and the organisations that you represent?

Mark Cameron: Good morning. Thank you ever so much for the opportunity to present evidence to the committee today and hopefully build on the excellent evidence that has already been provided this morning.

For the last six months or so, I have been working with The 5% Club and was appointed yesterday as its chief executive, taking over in early April. The 5% Club is a dynamic movement of employer members who seek to inspire positive action for increased and accessible workplace learning for all. Today we have over 525 members, representing over a million employees, of whom 61,000 are on earn-and-learn schemes recognised by The 5% Club, which is apprenticeships, sponsored students on course placements and graduate training. We are very proud that 60% of our members are small and medium-sized enterprises.

Our activity focuses on changing member behaviour and working with members to spread best practice so that they can create the right conditions for workplace learning for those apprenticeships, sponsored students and graduate trainees that I spoke about. We are also a campaigning charity that seeks to influence and change government policy across the UK, working with the UK Government as well as the devolved Administrations.

Jane Gratton: Good morning. The British Chambers of Commerce is the trade association for 53 accredited chambers of commerce across the UK. We work with tens of thousands of businesses, from sole traders and entrepreneurs through to the very largest businesses operating multinationally and employing between them 7 million or 8 million employees across the UK. We provide business support services to businesses on the ground. We are place-based organisations that convene businesses with local stakeholders and local schools, and support businesses to access training providers and to deliver, among other things, the Kickstart schemes and other support for local businesses and young people.

Lauren Roberts: Good morning, all. I am the youth engagement executive at the City and Guilds Group. We are primarily an awarding body. We award around 5 million learners a year, all over the world, to

either develop the skills to get into a job or develop them on the job they are on and then to get their next job.

I work primarily within the City and Guilds Foundation, which is the charitable arm of the organisation. We work with people in the communities that we work within to better serve them and to make sure we are connecting them to the right people, so that they can access as many opportunities as possible.

Q29 The Chair: Thank you all very much and welcome again from us. You will have heard most of the previous session. I just wondered how your organisations work with young people and what you are aiming to achieve. What are your goals and ambitions for the future in relation to what you can do to assist and solve the problem of youth unemployment?

Mark Cameron: Just to build on my opening point, The 5% Club is a member organisation. We work with our members to change their behaviours to support workplace learning. As I mentioned, that is generally centred on apprenticeships, graduate trainees and sponsored students. We also work with our members on the range of initiatives which the Government have published. Earlier today, you talked about the Kickstart scheme, work placements and traineeships in particular.

The 5% Club does what it says on the tin. Our founder, Leo Quinn, who is the group CEO of Balfour Beatty, set The 5% Club up in 2013 with a 5% metric to encourage employers to have 5% of their workforce in earn-and-learn schemes. Many of our members exceed that. His primary principle, though, was that what gets measured gets done. We would wish to champion that.

In terms of our ambition, we are very keen that there is a simplicity in the direction and guidance that is offered to business to respond to the challenge. We would wish to see organisations like The 5% Club set targets to work with employers and then be used as the kitemark for ethical and responsible employers by way of response. We are working on a range of schemes, including an employer audit that will test and validate our members' commitment not just to The 5% Club but to some of the aspects that have been explored earlier today, such as social mobility and inclusion.

On other ambitions, the skills White Paper sets out ambitious proposals for the future, and we wish to work with the Government to resolve those issues, take those forward and perhaps enhance them, and therefore we will be launching a manifesto later this year in which we will publish our response to them.

Jane Gratton: Chambers of commerce bring together business leaders and education leaders at the local level to deliver quality careers information for young people, from primary-school age through to those leaving further and higher education. In some areas, chambers have a leading role in setting up university technical colleges and in the governance of FE colleges and universities.

Secondly, chambers help firms to access training for young people. They link employers to colleges and independent training providers, and some

chambers also provide apprenticeships, traineeships and other training programmes. Thirdly, chambers are active gateways in the Kickstart scheme. We are already helping many thousands of businesses to access grant funding and deliver high-quality employability training for the young people who they are taking on.

In terms of our goals and ambitions on this agenda, according to our research, three in four employers are facing skills shortages. Chambers want to help their members develop this pipeline of talent and the skills for the future that will fill the job vacancies we have now and in evolving jobs. They also want their members to retain talented young people in the regions. We have seen a lot of talented young people moving out of regions to other cities to find work when there are fantastic jobs in local areas. Our agenda is to showcase the fantastic opportunities available locally, to keep those young people excited about the opportunities they have in their local area.

Finally, employers want young people to be well prepared for the world of work. They want to encourage young people from a diverse range of backgrounds to take a technical and vocational course as an alternative to the traditional A-level or academic route to employment.

Lauren Roberts: First of all, as a group, we work with young people by providing them with qualifications and the chance to complete courses, whether that is an apprenticeship, a technical qualification through a college or functional skills through a college. That is really just making sure that, no matter where a young person is, they are able to access the same opportunities and have access to those courses that will either help them access work or develop at work further.

Through the foundation, our primary goal is to help young people who face barriers to work. These are those who may have been excluded from mainstream education, and those on the brink of exclusion. We also aim to broaden young people's perceptions of apprenticeships. I started my career at the group six years ago as an apprentice myself. We look at how we can connect apprentices who are in work and who have been successful back to students who are still in school and thinking about those choices; we show them that apprenticeships can lead to successful careers in a variety of different industries.

Q30 Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Good morning. I wonder whether you could talk to us about how you see the labour market changing as a result of what is happening with Covid, and in particular what might be different as we come out of the Covid crisis. What ought we to do about those differences? A theme in the first part of the session was very much a sense that there is an un-joined-up approach to this major issue that we are discussing. How does that appear to you, and what might be done about it?

Lauren Roberts: One of the biggest changes we have seen already coming through is quite a lot of the careers in the jobs that young people tend to do at that young age have really been diminished. Some of the industries that a lot of young people will join to first grasp those transferable skills that they can take to further education or further

employment have really been diminished. We need to look at how we can help young people to still develop and evidence those skills through other activities or through other government initiatives where they are still able to prove that they have attended work and worked on their communication and all the skills that, regardless of what career they then choose to go into, they are still able to build on.

Looking at how the world of work is changing, when I was an apprentice starting, one of the biggest benefits I found was working in an environment with professionals who had been in the industry far longer than I had and still have been. I was able to learn work etiquette from them. We are moving more towards this virtual world, which is great, but there are some key bits of learning that I certainly valued. Speaking to fellow apprentices, I know they also value those. They really help to build your character at work and build your confidence moving into your next role. How do we ensure that we are still giving young people chances to access those opportunities while the world of work is changing?

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: That makes a lot of sense. Does that mean targeting sectors that could grow in the future and, in a way, backing away from those areas that, traditionally, young people have gone into first?

Lauren Roberts: It is about looking at where the opportunities are for young people. Creating work experience is great, but if you are creating work experience or pushing people towards an industry that at the moment has no clear future, you will find, as I did as a young person, that there are some great programmes that offer some great skills, but there is no job at the end. I was just cycling through different programmes with no end goal. I had another thing to put on my CV, but I was still unemployed.

Jane Gratton: Post pandemic, we are likely to see an acceleration in automation in the workplace. We are already seeing an increasing demand for digital and technical skills for young people entering the labour market. Young people will need to be prepared and supported to train and retrain frequently. It will be vital to have greater levels of investment in further and technical education. Flexibility will be required for providers and local stakeholders in terms of how to use funding locally to ensure that we have the right training provision in place, which really meets those evolving needs of the workplace and shifting industry trends.

We are seeing another change. We are encouraging businesses to adopt flexible and agile working, which helps to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce. Young people will need to be comfortable with this, to be self-starters, and to work remotely in some cases. They will also need the digital technology and broadband connectivity to be able to thrive in an environment that is not always a traditional workplace environment. Managers will have to create opportunities for young people to learn by osmosis, with the learning and experience that comes from sitting with more experienced colleagues in the office, as we move to a more hybrid model of working.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Should our responses on this issue be more long-term? Are too many short-term policies being pursued when we need look at a four-year or five-year window rather than what is right for the next six months or sometimes less?

Jane Gratton: Employers often say that they want stability and coherence in any system so that they have the confidence to plan and invest. When policies chop and change, it is often difficult for employers to do that long-term planning. It takes employers a while to take new initiatives on board and get them embedded, so the more certainty and stability we can offer employers, the better.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Mark, congratulations on your new job.

Mark Cameron: Thank you, Lord Hall. Jane makes some excellent points. The events of a year ago, which we are just about to remember, really brought home just how ill-prepared we were as a nation for the information age, in particular the shift from a traditional working environment to more remote and flexible working. There are a number of factors that were rapidly accelerated that we need to address.

We need to think about people who started work a year ago and have never met their work colleagues, and the methods and approaches we have to go through to onboard people successfully and make sure they are comfortable. We also have to make sure that they have the home infrastructure that can support that. I have seen some horrific pictures circulating of some people at home where the only place they could work was sat an ironing board at the end of the bed. That is neither a conducive nor inclusive work environment.

The nature of work will change rapidly with the information age. A significant number of jobs have been around for far too long. With the information age and new jobs, things will come into being and go out of being very rapidly. We need a skills system that can develop people to respond to that over the course of a career that could entail four, five or six different careers, many of which have not even been invented yet.

Q31 **Lord Layard:** How can we get enough apprenticeships offered to satisfy the demand from young people? We know what our vision should be for the vocational route in the labour market. It should be just the same as in the academic route: if you are qualified to progress to a particular level—of apprenticeship, in this case—there should be a place available for you. That principle has governed the success of the academic route in Britain ever since the Robbins committee report. If you are qualified to proceed to a level, there ought to be enough places for you to be able to proceed if you want to do that. That is the vision that we need to have for apprenticeships. If you are qualified to enter at any particular level—level 2, level 3 or higher—there should be a place available for you in your local area.

If we accept that as a national objective, how are we going to make that happen? Who will be responsible for that at the local level? I had always thought that the National Apprenticeship Service would be the agent to do that. I am not sure whether that is correct. Certainly, it may not be

the way things are currently going. What is the role of chambers of commerce in delivering this? Could it be an official role or an assistant role? Could all three of you tell us how we can get over this shocking situation where, in many cases, people who want to progress up that vocational route just cannot find the apprenticeship place?

Jane Gratton: We know that employers are much more confident about the new apprenticeships and the employer-led standards. One thing is ensuring that employers have a voice in shaping those apprenticeship standards, and that those standards meet the needs of businesses of all sizes. Very large employers are often involved in designing the standards, and so these trailblazer groups need to also factor in the needs of smaller employers. The recent announcement on the multi-employer apprenticeship will also be very useful, enabling some of the smaller employers, which cannot always offer an entire apprenticeship, to share the apprentice; the young apprentice gets lots of experience and is able to complete that course.

Going back to schools and careers, it is critical that schools understand what apprenticeships are and that young people are given all the facts and information. We say that there is no wrong route to good employment, but, for some young people, apprenticeships and technical routes are much more suited to their ways of learning. Employers are committed to these apprenticeships and want to be involved with schools, so the business and schools connection is absolutely important.

There is a role for intermediaries, chambers of commerce at the local level and other business support organisations in making sure that employers understand the real benefits of apprenticeships and promoting them. The incentives we are seeing recently will help employers to take on apprentices. Again, more flexibility, perhaps in how the apprenticeship levy can be used by individual employers and at the local level, would also help in the campaign to increase the numbers of apprenticeship opportunities for young people.

Lord Layard: We have school planning for the planning of school places in each locality. If this is that important, should there not be somebody who assesses the need for places in each locality and is then responsible for trying to drum up those places, with a direct quantitative effort to find enough places?

Jane Gratton: It is extremely important. We know from small employers that they can struggle to find the training that they need at the local level. Small employers may only need an apprentice once every three or four years, for example. Larger employers may need more apprentices on a more regular basis. There is an issue of aggregating demand at the local level to ensure that the training provision meets local demand as well as stimulating demand.

A minute's silence was observed.

Lord Layard: In particular, I am thinking about the role of local employers and organisations. Maybe it is the local authorities or the National Apprenticeship Service. Who should be responsible for a needs

assessment for apprenticeship places in the local area and then checking up that there will be the availability?

Mark Cameron: You mentioned local skills plans. Skills plans are a geographical function and a sector function. Many sectors have watched their skills demographics age over a number of years, which has created some of our national skills shortage problems.

On apprenticeship demand, we need to have clearly articulated the skills that we need at the national level for critical infrastructures and work back from there. A great example of government leadership on this is the green economy, and in particular the announcements in the Budget on making Leeds a centre for green skills. That will create momentum in those areas.

When it comes to demand for apprenticeships, we also need to be mindful that it is almost a victim of the economics as well. When there is an economic boom, there is no shortage of places available. In fact, often there are too few candidates for each place. When we go into economic downturn, unfortunately many employers think survival mode rather than long term and cut their intake, which is exactly what we have seen recently. We need to get employers to hold their nerve and perhaps consider options that allow employers to think about the short to medium term as well as being in survival mode, to create and sustain the momentum in the demand for apprenticeships in the round.

Lauren Roberts: I would echo everything that Mark and Jane have said. The only thing I would add is about how we maintain the quality of apprenticeships as the demand, hopefully, increases. How do we make sure that, for young people joining them, the employers fully understand the commitment of taking on an apprentice for a fixed term—a minimum of 30 hours a week for a year?

Exactly as Jane said, the idea of the flexi-apprenticeship offer is great. For smaller employers that have the will to take on a young person and pave their career path but potentially do not have the workload or the need to be able to fund that, being able to share that load, and for the young person to get a more rounded experience, will only be positive. It is really about how we ensure quality and that both the employer and the young person receive a good experience of what an apprenticeship is.

Q32 **Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall:** We may be in danger of asking you the same question over and over in different guises. I wanted to set aside for a moment the immediate impacts of the pandemic; they are enormous and very profound, and are, in the here and now, the thing that everybody is focusing on. I want to look five or 10 years ahead and pick up on some of what Lord Hall for example asked you about.

Thinking out in that way, what opportunities and vulnerabilities will you, as employers or those working with employers, face when it comes to the skills that will be needed and the shortfall, which you have all alluded to, in the skills that are being instilled in our younger people, who will be the workforce?

What could skills providers—I include the whole of the education system and beyond in this—do better to try to match what is being taught or given as experience to young people and the needs that we will have not tomorrow but in five or 10 years' time, as much as you are able to see them?

Lauren Roberts: I would say exactly as you said and talk about moving away from the immediate needs. It is about looking at how we best equip people with the skills needed to transfer between careers, especially young people. The generation coming up will change career more than any generation before them. How do we equip them with the skills needed to move throughout careers as they progress? Exactly as Mark alluded to, many of the careers that we will see in the next five or 10 years do not even exist yet.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Lauren, could I stop you there? I agree 100% with what you are saying. I would be really interested to know what you think from your immediate experience—as quite a young person, if I may say so. You are probably closer to the education system than most of us in the room. What are the obvious ways in which that could begin to happen that are not quite embedded yet, for example in relation to the curriculum or the way young people are encouraged to learn?

Lauren Roberts: It is already starting to happen, as Jane said. Employers having a lot more of a say in apprenticeship standards is a great one. When I did my apprenticeship, I was taught an array of business administration skills, which was great but was not linked to a career path. There was no employer say in making sure that what I was being taught through a college was going to benefit me while I was at work or taking that forward. It is about how employers can work better to make sure that the information being circulated to young people is beneficial and that they have more of an involvement in engaging with schoolchildren.

Through the foundation, we visit local schools and colleges. We educate them by discussion: "If you are interested in taking this subject and have an interest in this, what kinds of career paths are available to you from that?" We map more clearly to young people and students where their interests and skills lie at a young age and how they could progress them into a career. I certainly feel that this is missing in how we are preparing young people for leaving the education system and mapping their skills to an actual role and career.

We tend to find that quite a lot of young people—I know this from my own experiences—will start a degree or a long-term commitment based on something that they have a mild interest in because it is what everybody else is doing. How do we make sure that they are entering apprenticeships, courses, part-time roles or whatever it might be that will help them to develop the skills that they will need to help them progress but that will also be relevant in five or 10 years' time?

As a young person, it is hard to know what employers will look for in five years. How do employers work better with young people so that they are almost safeguarding themselves and equipping themselves with as many skills as possible that will still be necessary down the line, when they come to change careers in five, seven or 10 years' time?

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Could you perhaps give us one or two examples of the kinds of skills that you are talking about and are aware of that will always be flexible and necessary?

Lauren Roberts: I would say the set of employability skills as a whole, including how you communicate with people at any level. We have seen the need for IT skills more than ever. I know that has been referenced before. Look at the basic IT skills that students are taught in school; having to use those in an office environment, or now a home environment that has turned into an office, is just so different.

We have seen things like digital poverty increasing, which is terribly sad, as Mark spoke about before. Young people have all the will to learn but not the resources. They are not able to access some of the amazing courses and qualifications that are out there. If you only have one laptop between a family of six or seven, how are you going to access those and make the most of those opportunities?

The general employability piece about communication and resilience is probably the biggest one to come out of the pandemic. How do you bounce back? How do you bounce back from preparing for five years to sit an exam that you are told you can no longer sit? How do you demonstrate all that you have learned from a predicted grade? How do you translate that to employers at interview stage or whatever stage you get to?

Mark Cameron: I will approach the question by starting at the end and then working back to the start. The question centred on skills required in five to 10 years. We need a national plan that sets out exactly what skills we need as a nation for our ambitions for international success, be that continuing in the biomedical sciences, green, energy or construction. We really need to get that national plan. We then have to go right back to the basics and think about how young people are informed about the opportunities that they will experience later.

Currently, we have a very linear system that is set up almost for a top path. If you hit the GCSEs and the A-levels and go to a degree pathway, that is the best option for you and the whole system is biased towards it. That is not the right pathway for everybody. We need a system that understands that there needs to be parity of esteem across the whole system such that it is not just about the top path; it is about the pathway that is right for the individual. Building into that system, we need careers advice that sets out the options and then describes those pathways in an unambiguous and impartial way.

I am a former apprentice, but I went on to do a degree. My pathway was an apprenticeship, a degree and then into a senior management role. It could be as applicable to go through the Kickstart scheme or a

traineeship and then into an apprenticeship. You could do a role for a certain number of years and move into supervisory roles and be developed in that route. You could move sideways into other schemes, picking up on the points that Lauren made about those transferrable skills. We also need to recognise that pathway is complemented by charities and youth movements that also help to build employability skills. I am talking about the Scout Association, the Prince's Trust, et cetera.

It is a complex business, but it is not just about that top linear path. It is about every path, what is right for the individual and removing any prejudice or bias there may be against apprenticeships. For many, apprenticeships are the right route, not the wrong route.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Your point about parity of esteem is critical. If you could write to us with any thoughts about how that can be achieved as we go forward, that would be very welcome.

Jane Gratton: The basic skills—good numeracy, literacy and digital skills—will always be important. Employers want to see those skills, because those are the foundations on which they can work. In addition, we are looking at the personal attributes of young people, so their flexibility and resilience, which is particularly important for managing their own mental health in a rapidly changing workplace.

Take digital training and knowledge. It is changing so rapidly. The technology is moving on at such a pace. It is less about young people knowing how to do a particular form of coding and more about understanding how coding works and having the skills to keep up, adapt and apply the knowledge in that different setting as the workplace moves on at pace.

There is an element of making sure that the courses we have are future-proofed. We need employers to talk to colleges involved about that course content to make sure that young people are learning the latest things. We will always be slightly behind, but there needs to be at least some element of future-proofing and looking ahead. Particularly when we come to the net-zero agenda, we will be looking for the same sorts of skills but with specialist knowledge that young people will need in order to help business to be productive in this new low-carbon environment.

Q33 Baroness Newlove: This session has been absolutely brilliant. Baroness McIntosh has beaten me to my questions, which are similar, but she probably put them more eloquently than I would have.

I am very interested in all your comments. I work with students. I am pro-vice-chancellor at the University of Bolton and I work with young people. I absolutely love it. I am thinking of how they would feel listening to you guys, who are so positive. They are still very scared and nervous, because the basic skill is communication. In all of this, it is about communicating in an interview or to a career development officer or whoever. It is about having that resilience within you to be able to get that out.

I am looking at all the programmes that have been developed. It is mind-boggling how this all knits together. There is lots of investment, but we still have youth unemployment, which is why the committee is here today. Why is it not working? Why are they not engaging? Lauren has said a lot of what I was thinking. She articulated it very well.

I wonder whether employers need to have better conversations with the Government and the Government need to have better understanding of what you are trying to knit together for young people. I feel that the programmes should be longer, because when you start a business you do not do it for six months and then say, "I've cracked it". We do not give enough time, and that sends young people the message that they are only being used for a pilot, and they already do not feel worthy as it is. That divide is widening in that sense.

For me, it is about how we involve young people and provide them with the confidence to enter a workforce. We have dismissed practical skills to our detriment now. With the digital workforce and the pandemic, the flexible and digital platform will take over. That brings me back to the very beginning of the conversation. We are losing that communication again. Everything is digital, so they do not have to have that conversation. I also worry that social media has a lot of influence on young people.

I would like to ask all three of our witnesses what is truly missing. Of all these programmes, why are we not having good, positive outcomes for all young people entering the workforce? We still have NEETs. I hate the word "NEET"; everything is negative for young people. People feel that they are not as wealthy and will not be picked for good jobs. You have said everything possible. I would just like a personal view. With this language, I just feel sorry for young people. Governments, past and present, make these programmes to fit around politics and policies. We have to strip it right back to basics and say, "What does that young person really want?" because no one size fits all. I will be quiet now. I would be really interested if you could take anything from that to give me some responses.

Mark Cameron: Thank you very much for a really interesting question. I would echo my point about the complexity. For a young person, it is incredibly complex. I will echo some points from this morning about the complexity of the range of schemes that are on offer and the load that places on employers. There is only a finite capacity to deliver on many of these schemes, most of which have a work placement component to them. There are only so many places in the workplace for those placements. A stimulus to grow the economy and those opportunities would be most welcome.

It goes back to the careers advice, the dialogue with everybody and the point that the individual needs to go through a right pathway. Apprenticeships are fantastic, but there is a danger with the levy, which is a fantastic approach, that the time bar on spending the levy within two years forces people to look for more expensive schemes to spend the

levy on, which risks undermining some of the more important schemes that transition young people into work, like level 2s. Over the last 10 years, we have seen a reduction in level 2s and a significant increase in levels 4 to 7. The whole system has to be judgment-free and bias-free and allow the right discussion, and for the young person to have a meaningful discussion about what a career pathway could look like.

If you are a NEET at the moment, how do you get out of that? What are the options available for you and how do you progress? We heard earlier about youth hubs. Employers are very prepared to support that activity and to provide that advice. From the employer perspective, as I have mentioned, we want employers to hold their nerve, think for the future and not just about now. That planning for the future is important.

Lauren Roberts: It is a really great question. I agree with absolutely everything. It is a really hard one, because you have all these government schemes, which are amazing but, as you said, can be very tricky for both parties. You have employers that are very keen to invest in young people and want to do all they can to offer opportunities, but when there are so many schemes to pick from, how do you know which one is best for your business needs? As a young person myself who was NEET only eight or nine years ago, what scheme do you go for? Do I do an apprenticeship? Do I do a T-level? Do I join a Kickstart programme? Do any of those lead me to a real job at the end of the day, as I referenced earlier?

It is really about communicating with young people. We have found that there is a need to bridge that gap between employers that want to offer opportunities and inspire young people, and young people who want to work, earn money and progress but have no confidence whatever to approach employers. They do not know the etiquette. They do not know that when they apply to an apprenticeship they have to respond to the email to say they are attending the interview. They do not know how to communicate anything they do outside of school or college; employers really want to hear about volunteering. I have had dozens of young people ask me, "Can I talk about the fact that I am Scout? Can I talk about the fact that, for the last 10 years, I volunteered here?"

One of the key things is how employers interact with students and young people before they get to that stage, so that young people are not so scared and frightened the first time they interact with an employer at the head office in central London. They are stood there in their suit and have no idea what to say. How do we prepare them so that they are not these big scary people holding the key to their future?

We want young people to take interviews seriously and formally but also to understand more about the value they have to give to an employer. How do we do that? It is about opening opportunities before and having employers work more closely with schools and colleges, and speak to young people about opportunities in their organisations, rather than a young person finding something online, applying and then turning up without any real help or guidance on how to succeed.

Jane Gratton: At the risk of repeating what we said earlier, it is vital that schools have the capacity to engage with employers. We have seen it increase in importance in recent years, with the Careers and Enterprise Company coming along. The support that it has provided has been very helpful. Employers want to engage with schools. This is a way of having, in a safe environment, opportunities for young people to have a mock interview and help with CV writing. It allows young people to take part in real-world projects that apply and contextualise the learning they are having in the school classroom to what happens in industry.

During the pandemic, lots of the business interaction with schools has gone quite successfully online. That will not replace the experience of young people getting behind the doors of the factory and looking at what it is like on a shopfloor. It will not replace the experience of understanding how design technology is being used in manufacturing and seeing how the modern languages they are learning are helping businesses to trade internationally. The cultural awareness they gain through languages helps businesses to market themselves overseas. It is these sorts of opportunities.

Schools' business links are absolutely critical. I definitely agree with Lauren that businesses value extracurricular activity. They are looking for what young people have done outside of school that sets them apart. Employers tell us that opportunities to take part in sport or volunteering—anything that helps young people gain leadership skills and communication skills—is really highly valued.

Baroness Newlove: When I became Victims' Commissioner—I tell this to kids in schools and colleges—I had an interview at 49 in front of five civil servants, and I had never been interviewed by civil servants in my life. I come from a very working-class background. After that presentation, I went to the pub and had the biggest glass of wine ,because I was absolutely bottling it inside, to be perfectly honest. I have three daughters who I tell, "You're as good as anybody else".

It is about understanding and that ability to communicate. With all of this, maybe we need to look in the jobcentres and put young people to a different jobcentre, because some of them are absolutely appalling. That point is not for you guys to answer. I work very much with OnSide Youth Zones. I am not plugging that and I have no interest or anything like that. They create English and maths in a different way: they describe an item, look at pricing it, sell it and put the profits back into the youth zone. These are people who do not go with a formula of education.

Sometimes, with all these systems which the Government have put in place—I am a Conservative Peer, by the way—we are absolutely blocking the creative entrepreneurship of a young developer. I wonder whether businesses need to look at that person who is coming for an interview and see a different angle for that person and we could steer them towards a different position in that company. We always work to a straight line and we are not looking at that young person's creativity in a different way. I am looking to work with employers to do that.

I am asking you guys to be a bit more creative. I like Mark, who has done the apprenticeship. You tell your story very well. There are a lot of NEETs, as they call them. Lauren, I would never know that you were a NEET. You are intelligent and articulate, so I do not like the label. We block that creative entrepreneurship, which people do in a different way. I will end on that. It was just a supplementary to say that perhaps we all need to change our approach to the role to ensure that we get better confidence for the young people to come forward.

Mark Cameron: Baroness Newlove makes a really good point there about everyone being wired slightly differently. With the linearity she described, there is a danger of overlooking people. We need to focus sometimes on neurodiversity issues and the fact that people view the world differently. We work with our employers to take different approaches to that recruiting and onboarding, which has to move beyond credentials and focus on potential. It would be great to see that in the system.

Jane Gratton: The more experience young people have with employers, the more confident they will be. Generally, employers want to make the interview a safe and comfortable environment. Some of our chambers are working with recorded videos for young people so that the employer can watch the video before they come to interview. Again, they can get feedback on the video from schools and work coaches before they turn up. That is one way of having a practice interview beforehand in a way that does not damage any confidence. They can have the constructive feedback before the interview, so there are lots of initiatives and ideas that can support young people looking for work.

Lauren Roberts: It is about giving employers the confidence to signpost young people. A young person you are working with may not be right for the role; employers need to have the confidence to know what is right for that young person. The biggest thing I find is young people not receiving feedback after interviews and not knowing what they have done wrong. You are cycling through rejection email after rejection email, not knowing where you can improve. Employers should make sure that if they are letting a young person down they either signpost them or give them feedback to learn from. That is what they will find most valuable, at the end of the day.

Q34 **Lord Storey:** My question is one that we could spend a whole session talking about. We will probably have to. I am talking about mainstream education and how we organise it for young people. Currently, we have a very knowledge-based curriculum, with an EBacc that does not, for example, include digital, technical or creative subjects. The Government want 90% of young people to be doing that EBacc by 2025.

Are GCSEs fit for purpose? What about summer-born children, A-levels and BTEC? Then we get to T-levels. There are a whole range of issues there. Perhaps you can pick on something that you feel passionate about and want to pursue, and then we can come back to this at a later date. How can I say this carefully? I was quite shocked when a left-leaning, socially aware academic said to me, "At least the children who failed the

11-plus got a damn good technical education in many areas". Now we have an education system that is geared towards the academic pupils.

Mark, I will start with you, because in a sense you summed up everything that I agree with or think about. You talked about the need for parity of esteem, the importance of careers advice and clearly spelling out the pathways that young people should be going on, because it is not all one route.

You talked about transferrable skills and changing parental aspirations. I absolutely agree, but it is not just about changing parental aspirations. It is about changing the way we view education, because, as I said before, most parents, and probably all of us sitting in this Select Committee, wanted our children to have a good education. Part of that good education was them -passing their GCSEs, going into the sixth form and going to university. How do we break that logjam and ensure that we have an education that suits the needs of each and every young person?

Mark Cameron: You nearly answered the question for me, so thank you. Rather than reiterate the points that I have made, which you so eloquently played back, we need to change attitudes. This is about national behavioural change and about discussion. Discussion, as I said earlier, should not focus on the top path being the right path or the best path. People want to take pride in what they do and live up to what others think of them. In a social media world, where likes are important, people want other people to like their choices.

We need a campaign-based approach that can really change attitudes and restore balance in the system. For some, the university pathway or a PhD is right. For others, a traineeship or going straight into work is right. That might be because, for some, the learning pathway that is very qualification-focused is the wrong pathway and they are more suited to a vocational pathway. That is not to say that a spark will not be lit later, which they can come back to and revisit education. It is about changing attitudes, and that needs a concerted effort and leadership. Fundamentally, it is about national behavioural change.

Lord Storey: Jane, I will remind you that you talked about the importance of the skills gap. You thought that T-levels were a way of dealing with that skills gap, or skills shortage. Figures published in October show that only 400 students were studying a digital T-level and only 250 were studying a construction T-level course. At a time when we want to develop our infrastructure in this country, this is such a small number of young people. Have we got it wrong? Why is that? Do we need to ensure that schools are linked more closely to vocational opportunities? What is your take on this?

Jane Gratton: The job of getting young people ready for the workplace, with the skills that will make them succeed in work, is a shared responsibility. It is the role of business, educators and government. We have to work together to get it right for young people. Business has long been calling for more technical education. We see T-levels as very important in providing that quality alternative to the A-level. As I have

said before, one is not better than the other, but there are different routes depending on what is right for the individual young person.

T-levels are still very new. What is great about them is that they are employer-led, so employers are involved in designing the qualifications. Employers will be required to provide quite considerable, lengthy work placements. Again, being able to split those work placements between a number of employers will help smaller employers to get involved. We cannot afford for T-levels to fail. Employers are behind them. At the moment, awareness is still quite low, but it is rising. Employers that are engaged are enthusiastic about the opportunity for T-levels. Some employers are wondering how they fit in with apprenticeships.

We need to be very clear on the pathways and have porous pathways so that you can move from technical to academic to apprenticeships as you move through your career, so that they are not seen as siloes. Each should be seen as a quality alternative to the others. In summary, it is vital that we get more young people taking technical qualifications. There is a real shortage in the workplace. They are only going to become more and more important as industry 4.0 takes over and the workplace becomes more automated and digitised. Everybody needs the skills to be able to work with technology.

Lord Storey: Lauren, if you do not mind me saying, you are one of the youngest members of this opportunity to talk. You probably have the most recent experience of mainstream education. Have you any thoughts or suggestions?

Lauren Roberts: I will touch on everything that we have said already in this hour. It is about those misconceptions and how we change them. When I left school, it was brave to go to college and do a technical qualification rather than go into sixth form. It was even braver to do an apprenticeship. Nobody really knew what the end goal would be: "Do you get a qualification? Are they going to pay you?" I was asked that quite a bit. It is about how we show people of all ages, whether it is parents, career advisers or students, the progression that an apprenticeship or another type of education can get you.

We have had such an increase in the newly developed or newly taken-up degree apprenticeships. As we see some of those people completing Kickstart programmes, T-levels or whatever it may be, how do we connect them back to the young people making those decisions, so that they hear from them? When I was making my choices, I had an assembly every week from university. I never heard from an employer, so it was quite clear that was the route that everybody was going down.

How do we make sure that we are linking those success stories back to the young people making those decisions, so that they are aware of the routes? If university is for them, that is great. If it is not, they have other options that are just as valuable and probably more beneficial to them as individuals.

Q35 Lord Baker of Dorking: You said a moment ago, Jane, that your employers wanted interviewees to have good literacy, numeracy and

digital skills. What do you do about it as chambers of commerce in relation to a local school? Take a local school in your particular area. You will find they are virtually doing no digital training between 11 and 16. The number of computer exams at 16 has dropped by 40% since 2015.

What are you, as chambers of commerce, saying to the Government? Are you going to insist that your voice must be heard more loudly in the arrangement of teaching in schools, or just digital? There are other things as well as digital. There is experience in handling metal and all the other things that are needed. Are you going to take a much stronger line? Are the Government going to let you take a stronger line? When you work with UTCs, your members determine the curriculum of the school. Are you going to demand that sort of power when the Government say they want to put you at the heart of education?

Jane Gratton: Our members are very enthusiastic about university technical colleges. Chambers have been involved in setting up UTCs. Big employers are involved in a hands-on way, not only in helping to govern those organisations but also in ensuring that young people have access to the latest technology and that learning is applied and contextualised. They have had some fantastic results. We are seeing almost 100% of young people moving into jobs, apprenticeships and further training. We know that that model works.

To be fair to all young people, we need to make sure that they are getting at school the experience they will need of technology, computing and all the other things that you have mentioned.

Lord Baker of Dorking: They are not at the moment. They simply are not getting it.

Jane Gratton: The Government are very keen to talk to employers. The *Skills for Jobs* White Paper sets out a clear ambition to put employers and the business voice at the heart of skills planning. We are very interested in hearing how that will work. It is absolutely critical. Everything that we have said on the call today involves making sure that young people are well prepared for the workplace. There is huge opportunity in the White Paper. We wait to hear more announcements from DfE on what that will mean.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, can I thank our three witnesses for a splendid session? It has been exceedingly valuable. You have pointed us in a substantial number of directions. If there are further things you can think of us that you would like to say, our call for evidence is launched on Thursday, so we would be very happy to receive anything in writing from you as well. Thank you again, on behalf of the committee, for your contribution, which is deeply appreciated.