



Youth Unemployment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Youth Unemployment

Tuesday 18 May 2021

10.15 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Shipley (The Chair); Lord Baker of Dorking; 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; Lord Woolley of Woodford.

Evidence Session No. 8

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 67 - 83

Witness

I: Sir Kevan Collins, Education Recovery Commissioner, Department for Education.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witness

Sir Kevan Collins.

Q67 **The Chair:** Welcome to this evidence session of the Youth Unemployment Committee, which is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website. A transcript of the meeting will be published on the committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to it where necessary.

Our first witness today is Sir Kevan Collins, Education Recovery Commissioner in the Department for Education. Sir Kevan, welcome. Will you say a word of introduction?

Sir Kevan Collins: Thank you very much for inviting me to present to the committee. I was appointed by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State to give advice and guidance as we recover from the pandemic and the unprecedented shock to our education system. To set that up, on average, children in England have missed 115 days of face-to-face education, which is the largest number of days of any country in Europe, and certainly the biggest loss in education that we have suffered in a generation.

Q68 **The Chair:** Thank you very much for that. Let me ask you a very broad first question, which will develop what you have just said. What do you think the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted as the biggest weaknesses in our current education system, and what remedies would you propose to address them?

Sir Kevan Collins: The crisis has highlighted both the weaknesses, if you like, as well as the strengths, and the best of our system. I would not mind giving you a couple of those.

The best of our system is the innovation—the way in which teachers have literally turned on a sixpence to produce their lessons online and to provide remote learning for many of our children; the way in which parents have leaned in and done more work with their children than we could ever have imagined to support their children’s learning; and the way in which we have engaged across education and more broadly in public service to deliver, for example, as schools are now doing, masses of testing for the system.

There has been the best, but the worst is the point you raised about the weaknesses. I would mention three. The first is, as ever, that it has revealed the incredible variation of experience that our children receive. Some children had a fantastic experience in the support of online learning and the way their schools supported it. Unfortunately, that was not consistent, and others received very little. Variation is a huge problem in the English education system, and it revealed that again for us.

It also revealed, and this is linked to variation, the link between disadvantage and inequality. If we are not very careful, one of the great legacies of Covid could be growing educational inequality, because we know that the pandemic hit hardest on the poorest as regards educational loss, and many other aspects of Covid. We have to think very

hard about the way we do not allow the gap to grow, which we already know is an issue in the English education system.

Finally, it revealed the overcentralisation—that schools might not be connected in the way that they should be to networks of support: local authorities or multi-academy trusts. Many were connected and had a fantastic set of support. Others were quite isolated and alone. This fragmentation of the system was revealed as something that we also need to address.

The Chair: May I pursue that? I would like to hear more about that absence of networks, but you might want to do that in writing later.

You referred to variations of experience. There have been weaknesses, which was my original question, but there are also some good practices that the pandemic may have illuminated. Will you say something about what the good practices have been that we might be able to replicate in the longer term?

Sir Kevan Collins: Yes, of course. There have been a few captures, if you like, from the experience. The first and obvious one is the huge leap forward we have made in the way that technology is part of education, and how that is now becoming woven into the fabric of how we provide good learning. We will never again go back to a world where these two things are separated. I think we will link them together in good schools and good systems for ever.

A good example would be that many schools created online lessons that you can just flip between school and home, which extends the experience. I do not think that the way in which schools do parents' evenings will ever be the same again. Zoom for parents' evenings is much better than trying to find a car parking space on a wet Tuesday and waiting your turn. It is a much better way of doing this. However, if that is a capture, it also reveals the challenge of the digital divide. If it is going to become part of the system, it has to be part of the system for everybody. We know that the DfE has done a pretty remarkable job in distributing well over 1 million laptops, but we probably need to go even further. It is fundamental for every child who is going to learn to have access not only to the hardware but to the connectivity. Technology is a capture and a challenge.

The second, which has been being overlooked slightly, is that we should continue and extend parents' engagement in children's learning. We know the evidence on this. It is very clear that parental involvement and engagement makes a huge difference. We have seen parents do so much more through the pandemic. It is a question of how we build on that and ensure it becomes part of the experience of every parent, whereby every parent is invited to be involved in their child's learning.

Those are a couple of examples where I think there are benefits that we should now capture and build on.

Q69 **The Chair:** I will ask another supplementary about assessment in a

second, but may I remind everyone taking part to mute if you are not speaking because a little bit of feedback is coming through?

Sir Kevan, thank you for that. Knowing a lot of teachers, which I guess we all do, we know that the assessment systems for 16 year-olds and 18 year-olds are a bit different. The system has been disrupted. What is the long-term future, in your view, of assessment?

Sir Kevan Collins: To be clear about where we are, as you know, in August 2020 the Government announced that GCSEs and A-levels would take place as normal. Of course, given the events and the way in which the pandemic disrupted everything in society, in January it was announced that they would not go ahead. In the interim, there has been a big consultation with the system, particularly with teachers, to try to work out how we resolve the decision not to have a formal exam system, and we are in the middle of it now. Essentially, this year we will use teacher assessment for GCSEs and for A-levels.

As for the long-term future, I believe—and this is not the policy; it is just me speaking on a personal level—there is a big discussion for us to have, particularly around, for example, GCSEs at 16. For many young people, that is a very important marker and it works very well if they are going to choose A-levels. Exams are a very fair way of learning about children's attainment and, to a degree, their potential—I think it is the fairest way that we know. But the problem with GCSEs, of course, is that too many young people are asked to do their GCSEs again. As you know, in England, if you do not achieve a certain level in English and maths at 16, you are asked to repeat your GCSEs in English and maths. In that second chance, the vast majority do not pass again.

We have this issue where we ask you to do something, and you fail, and you do it again, and you fail. There has to be a better way of doing that. If we think that the level 2 qualification is the key marker that accesses you into apprenticeships and work, perhaps we could give some young people four years to take that exam rather than two years and fail, two years and fail. There is a big discussion to be had about the future of GCSEs.

I also think there is a big discussion to be had about the future of online exams. We need to move more quickly to assessment online, because I think that is the future. That opens up the opportunity, particularly in A-levels, to ensure that people get their grades before they get their offers at university, which is another conversation that we should be having. This is not policy. These are, as I said at the beginning, just my views after spending nearly 40 years in the education system.

The Chair: I will come to Lord Layard in a moment, but, Lord Hall, you wanted to ask something.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: I want to go back to something you said in reply to the supplementary question about what we have learned that is good out of this Covid crisis. You very interestingly mentioned parental engagement. Will you talk a little about what that might be going forward and how you could build on it? When you talk about disadvantage, that

can go right to the heart of disadvantaged parents versus parents who can afford to take the time, et cetera, which is an argument that I am sure you are very well versed with.

Sir Kevan Collins: One of the issues about the impact of the shock on children's learning, not just their academic learning but their whole development, is that the story of Covid has not yet been written for our children. We do not really know what has happened. Some good assessments tell us how far behind they are in reading—three to four months—but in maths it is more like four to five months behind what they would have been. That is what we call learning loss.

There are so many other domains of development and learning, particularly on the non-academic side of social interactions or well-being in its general sense. We do not have very good ways of measuring that, but we all know that it is so important in learning, and that the academic and non-academic domains live in a virtuous relationship. For example, we are being told by early years practitioners that 46% more children are not ready to learn. We have to address those issues.

To your point about parents, it seems to me that if it is about the social, personal and academic, which are the outcomes of a great education, parents can engage themselves and be involved in all those things. Some of the parental engagement that we would like to see is, yes, involved in learning, but some is involved in just building a richer experience for our young people: the range of sports, activities and social events that they are engaged in.

All these things matter to great learning. We know that parents have done a really great job, for example, with supporting their children to read, and that is a universal and wonderful act of intimacy between a parent and a child. I guess we need to think more creatively about the way in which we can support parents, especially when it is more difficult economically to be involved in a richer set of experiences with their children beyond some of the more obvious academic things you can do.

Q70 The Lord Bishop of Derby: Noting my interest in this as vice-chair of the Children's Society, I wanted to ask whether you are aware of the Children's Society *Good Childhood* report, an annual report. We have been doing some work on exactly what you have been discussing, Sir Kevan—on the intersection between a child's well-being and welfare and their experience of school and education, and how that leads into a better future for them.

Sir Kevan Collins: I am aware, and it is good to reply to you because I am speaking from Derbyshire. I am called the Education Recovery Commissioner and, in many ways, I wish I had pushed a bigger button and said that what we need is childhood recovery. In a way, it would be very easy for us as a community to miss the fact that children have suffered as much as, if not more than, most people in this experience. They have missed out on the opportunity to play with each other and for teenagers to hang out with each other. All these key life development moments with peers have been missed.

As I say, I do not think the story has yet been written. I think the effect will be quite profound on some young people. For example, you might think of a two year-old who has not had the experience for half of their life of being with other babies and children, as they have been in their home alone with their parents. That might be great, but we know that also might mean something for the development of their social skills and social interaction with others. The work that I am doing starts from two years old and goes to 19. In every phase of learning the effect of this disruption is quite profound—on those who have had less time to learn in FE as well as children in the early years. Our response has to be broad, and it has to be about childhood, and not just about a narrow set of skills.

Q71 Lord Woolley of Woodford: Good morning, Sir Kevan. Thank you for coming to speak with us today. I have a 15 year-old son who ordinarily would be taking his GCSEs, so I have seen the disruption at first hand. Actually, he and his peers have had to take many more tests, which has been quite stressful, over a long period.

My question to you is: has the Covid-19 crisis developed or altered your views about the adequacy of the national curriculum in equipping young people for the modern world?

Sir Kevan Collins: It has not profoundly affected my view of the national curriculum as such. It has made me think very deeply about the value of the broad educational experience. Some people call that the whole curriculum, which is more than what is written in the documents called the national curriculum. It has made me think very deeply about the broader experience children have at school.

We have all realised the value particularly of the social experience of school as well as the academic. This goes back to my point about the blended learning between technology and face-to-face education. I think we are learning that there is quite a lot that can be transacted in this way on a screen, but it will never replace being with your friends and peers in a rich social experience.

I have been exploring a lot in relation to the responses about whether children have enough time at school, and whether the school day is long enough. This is a live question. Not more time for another lesson necessarily, but more time for more sport, more volunteering, more drama, more art—the richer experiences that schools are incredibly well placed to provide. It has made me think not so much about the curriculum, but more about the broader school experience.

Q72 Lord Storey: Thank you so much for everything you have said. It is just such a breath of fresh air. I say that as a former primary/middle school teacher. We knew before Covid that the curriculum was very much squeezing out some of the creative subjects. This will have accelerated during Covid where we have, quite rightly perhaps, concentrated on numeracy and literacy. Is one of the lessons we have learned from what children and young people have been through the importance of this broad curriculum? How do we in reality make the people who pull the levers appreciate that and understand that, because the trend has been

in the opposite direction in recent years?

Sir Kevan Collins: I think there is quite a lot of data to direct our attention. We can look at the issues of physical health around, for example, obesity in young people or oral health, or mental health, where we see a huge reported increase in the number of young people who are presenting with mental health issues. One of the other roles I have is as chair of the Youth Endowment Fund, which is a youth crime initiative funded by the Home Office. Some of the issues of violence and crime in some of our communities have so much to tell us that the well-being of our children requires a broad and rich set of considerations.

Where I think we have gone wrong—and I think it is quite arid and facile—is that we have put these things as false dichotomies, where you either promote the academic or the non-academic. Where the research has been taking us in the last 10 or 15 years or so is that these things live in a virtuous relationship and that they really matter.

I will give you one quick example. The value of play when you are very young—I might argue the value of play in your whole life—builds the capacity to self-regulate and to delay gratification. Self-regulation is very important when you come to consider subjects such as maths: you can persevere; you can learn strategically.

This experience might have helped us put to bed, I hope, this false dichotomy that it is either academic or non-academic, that it is either one school structure or another, and understand that it is more complicated than that, and that it should be a rich and broad experience, pretty much in the tradition of a rich and broad experience.

In all this I need to make it clear that I do not take one step back from understanding the value of high skills and attainment. Reading is still the best proxy measure for a life of well-being and wealth, if you track it through from, say, seven years old. This is about improving skills and knowledge as well as having a richer and broader experience.

Q73 **Lord Layard:** I would like to pursue the specific implications of making well-being a much more specific goal of school education. It is good that the Government have made what they call relationship, sex and health education a compulsory part of the curriculum, but I would love to know whether you think it should be strengthened.

Will you comment on four specific issues? First, should there be some indication of how many hours a year should be devoted to this? At the moment it can be satisfied in a pretty minimal way.

Secondly, do you think that there should be much more specific training of the teachers who are going to teach this incredibly important area of life skills in the curriculum? As we know, the Education Endowment Foundation, with which you were concerned at one time, has been piloting evidence-based materials. Do you think we should have training courses to enable people to use these materials in a way that would make for an effective outcome? We know that it is very easy to be well intentioned in this area—the SEAL programme was well intentioned, but when evaluated in secondary schools it was found to have no effect. Do

you think that there is a role for much more training and use of evidence-based materials?

Thirdly, should we be encouraging schools to measure the progress of the well-being of their children? In south Australia, for example, the Government run a questionnaire system, which makes it very easy for schools to administer it and process the results. Do you think we should be doing something like that?

Fourthly, when it comes to failures of mental health and the need for help for specific children, do you think we should be rolling out mental health support teams in schools much more rapidly?

Sorry to be so long, but I think that it is important not just to have general ideas in these areas but specific policies that could make a difference. I would love your comments on those four points.

Sir Kevan Collins: I think that you are right that it is time to get more practical and definite about what we might do, if this is so important, because it needs to be more than just nice words.

First, in many schools the time in the curriculum is used pretty well, and people focus on the content. However, and this links to your point about training, if you are not clear about your intention with the time for PHSE—health and sex education—it can easily become a time that becomes lost and flabby in a curriculum. I think you are right that the time is important, but we need to be very clear about what we want to do with the time and why it is so important.

That links directly to training, because one aspect of the recovery programme that I am responsible for presenting up to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State requires that we invest in our teachers. It is our most critical resource. Recovery will happen because children are in front of great teaching. By the way, recovery is not an activity but the outcome of a great education system, and it will take time.

One element of recovery that we will have to think very hard about is the social and emotional learning that I have been talking about. Those lessons are very important for that kind of learning, and we need to train teachers how to use that time to best effect.

I was the chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation—EEF—for a number of years, an educational research organisation. We learned that when you used that time well it had an impact not just on the aspects of social development but on academic attainment. It has knock-on effects, to my point about the virtuous relationship, but it requires content and specific training and clarity about what you are trying to do, and how to do it well.

When you move from that sort of programme, I worry about measuring too hard because whenever you measure things in education you can get unintended consequences. I know that work in Australia, and I know we have here a large number of resources, such as the strength and weaknesses questionnaires. There is a set of programmes increasingly

coming on to the system about how to measure these domains of learning.

There are three things to measure in the recovery programme to see whether it is done well. The first is to have attainment back to where we should be. Secondly, are we narrowing the gaps in attainment that will be hit by Covid? Thirdly, are our children well as regards their well-being and non-academic skills? I worry about measuring that with some kind of examination or national test. At school level, it is really important that schools use instruments and tools to help them understand that. You can learn lots from young people doing the right kinds of surveys. Nationally, I think you might get unintended behaviours. You will get people gaming and doing it in a way that is not healthy.

In our accountability framework, we have not just assessments but Ofsted, and one part of Ofsted's framework is all about well-being and behaviour. I would like to use that as the vehicle that understands that aspect of children's development and whether it is going well in your school. I am not a big advocate of a national test. I am an advocate of schools doing lots of surveys, doing lots of work on the ground and perhaps sampling that, but not having a new national test on it.

Thirdly, to your point about child and adolescent mental health services, the new mental health services and support funded through the NHS that is working in schools needs good evaluation, but it must be useful; it must be the right way to go. We have learned with social workers in school, for example, that if you can identify very early and get the support in at the school level, it prevents long-term risk and long-term failure. I am all for moving these services as near to schools as possible. I think that would be a useful programme to roll out to more schools, if not all schools.

Lord Layard: May I follow up for a moment on the measurement question? I perhaps did not say what I was really meaning to say, which is that one way of proceeding is to make it easier for schools to measure the well-being of their children, not to require them to do it, but just to make it easier for them. I think that is the south Australian system. It is completely voluntary but it is made easy. I would love to know your comments on that—on just making it easy.

Sir Kevan Collins: I would not only like to make it easy—I would go the next step and say that, at the school level, I would be surprised if it is not something they were increasingly doing. But I do not want to have a national test that comes in one day a year. I would expect every school to begin to have approaches that allow them to get information back about how well their children are and how well they are responding—to my earlier point—to the experience that the school is creating for them.

Q74 **Lord Baker of Dorking:** Sir Kevan, I congratulate you warmly on many of the comments you have made this morning. They are well in advance of the Department for Education, and that really is a huge advantage.

You said earlier that to reduce inequality every child should have a

laptop. I hope that will be one of your recommendations. I know the Government have given out 1 million, but they should give more and ensure there is digital connection.

However, my question to you is: if GCSEs are restored next year—your views on GCSEs are very interesting—you have 12 months for an enormous catch-up for disadvantaged children. As you know, about 2 million to 3 million disadvantaged children a year get below grade 4. As you said earlier, they have lost four or five months of maths. How can they catch that up, and learn new maths, and revise for a written exam in the next 12 months? I think it would be grossly unfair to expect them to sit a written exam next year.

Sir Kevan Collins: There are some quite good examples of how you can catch up quickly. I do not think this is a one-year job. There is a huge issue about catching up—it will take time. Some activities, we know from the evidence, can make a big difference. We know that one-to-one small group tuition—a second wave of learning—is hugely effective. In fact, it is so effective that about 25% of all parents in England already pay for it, and 40% of parents in London, from the Sutton Trust surveys, are now buying tutoring for their children.

I think that we need to expand the offer of tutoring small group second-wave teaching for all children. We already have the programme in place with the £1.7 billion that the Government have invested in recovery. We have a whole programme of small group tuition for young people in FE. It looks like it is effective. The take-up is good. Some of the early evidence is promising. I think that there are ways of giving children a second chance.

The second thing that I think we should do in trying to catch up this loss is through the way we invest in the quality of teaching. Our colleagues who work in the FE sector do an amazing job, but I do not think that we support them in their training and development as well as we should. That is a whole element of our workforce—and I would say the same for early years, by the way.

Finally, there is work we can do about time. As you will know better than me, Lord Baker, on average in England in that phase of learning we fund about 17 study hours a week. For our European competitors, now, and partners, it is more like 22 hours a week. Another element is whether we create more time for learning.

These are all options for some of the things you can do if you want to try to catch up. In the end, you are right: it is only ever fair to examine someone against a curriculum they have been taught.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Thank you very much. I very much welcome those comments.

So far, how many of the 2 million to 3 million disadvantaged children have had tutoring? Do you have any figure on that?

Sir Kevan Collins: So far we have registered about 193,000 young people in total for tutoring. I think we need to get to at least a million a year through the Parliament. The exam question that was set for me by the Prime Minister was: how do we recover the loss for all children in this Parliament in their academic and non-academic learning? My recovery proposal has been built on trying to deliver against that exam question. I think that tutoring and small group tuition is part of the mix, but we will need to provide that experience on a scale that we have not seen before.

I think that will eventually become part of the fabric of education. We need to appreciate that, if we do not put it into the system, the tutoring that is done outside of school will drive the inequality of the system. It is a genie out of the bottle. We have to respond to this new experience, whereby tutoring is so big in the life of children, as it should be. Parents are quite right to do that. We have to ensure that every child has access to it; otherwise it will become a driver of growing inequality.

Q75 **Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall:** Thank you very much for being with us. I have found most of what you have said this morning really helpful, and on the edge of inspiring, so thank you.

The question I was going to ask you is about the reliance on digital technology that we have seen in the last year. You have pointed to the inequalities that were revealed by that reliance and about the future use of technology. I think that you have already addressed that to some extent. If there is anything more that you want to say about that, we would all be very interested to hear it.

Will you elaborate a bit more on what you have said about teachers? I have been busy writing down potential quotes that you have come up with, but the most important one for me was when you talked about investing in teachers. I should say that my family is stuffed full of teachers and one of my closest family is a school leader in a secondary school in an urban setting.

My observation of what has happened, not just in the last year but over the last several years, is that the pressure on teachers has become on the edge of intolerable, to put it bluntly. We ask more and more of them. We expect that they will not only deliver the specific teaching skills to a very high level but expect them, as we are now discussing, to incorporate into their practice all sorts of other things to do with well-being, which I entirely endorse and think is right. What are your views on how we can best support teachers at all levels? I am particularly concerned about school leadership and, again to be blunt, what care are we taking of the mental health and well-being of our teachers? What can we now do to ensure that is looked after? If they are not well, they will not do their job well, and everything that we expect of them will be very hard to deliver.

Sir Kevan Collins: I hope that this does not sound trite, but I always say that however far you travel, if you strip me back to my bones, I am still basically a teacher. It is how I started in my life.

The good news is that we have 450,000 teachers—it is one of the mass professions—which is 12,000 more than we had in 2010. Applications to

train to teach are up by over 15%, which is good news. The task is to capture and harvest that desire to become a teacher, and bring those people in, and nurture them, and care for them, and grow them, and make them our teachers of the future.

There is a circular piece around your point about technology and teaching. One of the elements that I have not yet mentioned is that one of the great advances of technology is how it supports you as a teacher. Low-level tasks such as marking correct work could be done by technology very quickly, or highlighting aspects of work where groups of children in your class need more attention. Technology is brilliant at being able to support you in your decision-making, highlighting areas of work and supporting your planning over time. Technology has a huge place in not only supporting children's learning but reducing the load on teaching. Again, that has been inconsistent.

The key to teaching and the new burdens—and, by the way, I think it is much harder than it ever was when I was doing it in the late 1970s and early 1980s—is ensuring that people are trained for the task you are asking them to do. That is why, in my proposals, I am very strong on training and support for teachers. This is all building on some great work that the DfE has been doing. There is something called the early career framework, which is a guaranteed two-year programme of support with a mentor who is an experienced teacher. It is a really well-designed framework of what you need to know and need to be able to do. That has been very popular in schools and I want that to be available to every teacher at the start of their career. You should start with all that support all in place.

In the life cycle of teaching, all too often we train you and then leave you alone. We need to give you a life cycle of support all the way through your career. There is a whole piece of work being done on what are called national professional qualifications. Over the last 20 years, particularly through the development of cognitive science, we have come to know more about learning and what constitutes great teaching than we have ever known. It is about how we bring that together and make that available through world-class training for all our teachers.

That is the surest way—and the evidence shows you that one of the best ways of retaining people in teaching is not just the money. The quality of support and training has a huge bearing on people going to work in schools, and staying in schools. That is happening. The starting salaries have been increased by the Government, which is great; they are up more than 5% for those starting teaching. A lot of the steps are going in the right direction, but this is the moment when we must now gather and support our teachers to be the best they can be.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Will you say a word about the leadership issue as you see it? What you said about supporting teachers at an early stage in their career is extremely important for them to go on and grow, but those people in leadership roles now, in my observation anyway, are in considerable need of support, and I am not sure it is clear where they are getting it from.

Sir Kevan Collins: I think that is a really well-made point. I do not think I have a great answer. We talk about school closures, but I need to keep reminding myself, and everybody else, that that never happened for the head teachers. Every school stayed open for its vulnerable children. You had a large number of children being taught online and children in the classroom, then suddenly you have to work out testing. You have to organise bubbles and space. The load on our leaders, as ever in England's schools—and I know I will get shot down for it—particularly in some of our small primary schools, falls on one person.

To be honest, I think it is heroic what they have done for us in the last 18 months, and I worry about Covid fatigue and a backlog of people who might be saying that this is a time to rethink. How we present the recovery will be a big signal to that community and that sector as to whether they lean in. There is a responsibility to get the recovery programme right, so that we show people that we are serious about the things they were serious about, and the things that they put so much extra effort into each day to make happen.

I said that it was not going to be a good answer. I do not know where that support is coming from. It goes back to my question of whether you are connected to colleagues or in networks, whether you are supported or whether you are alone and isolated. I think that is when it is really very difficult.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: On the question of support, would you agree that the tone in which we as politicians address our teachers and teacher leaders is very important, and that we should say more often how much they are valued and less often how much they do wrong?

Sir Kevan Collins: I was asked to take this on in February. In that time I have made it my business and spoken to getting on for 2,000 head teachers. These conversations direct with our head teachers are very important, as well as with teachers, children and their parents. I have spoken to all those communities. In listening to them, talking to them and the way in which we engage with them, you will hear from the tone of my voice that I have nothing but admiration and respect for what they do.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I absolutely hear that, thank you very much indeed.

Q76 **Lord Woolley of Woodford:** Sir Kevan, on the point about teachers, you will know that the National Foundation for Educational Research suggested last year that there was worrying concern about the growing attainment gap for some black minority ethnic children. How important do you think it is to lean into the deficit, if you like, of black teachers? The National Union of Teachers suggested there is a shortage of about 50,000.

A second point on the theme that you mentioned of catching up, do you think that we are missing a trick in regard to the potential of after-school clubs being situated in faith centres—churches, mosques, gurdwaras and community centres—to help with this monstrous catch-up? You

highlighted the importance of interventions that keep people on track and potentially enable them to go on to reach their greatest potential.

Sir Kevan Collins: The representation of our communities in the teaching workforce and in the leadership of our schools, frankly, is nowhere near where it should be. For a number of years I was the director of children's services in Tower Hamlets in east London. It was always a question of how we could get more people in our community becoming the teachers of our community and the leaders of our schools. It is one of those examples where you need to have more than just good intentions. The example there would be one of working with a university, training teaching assistants who had the right A-levels and right qualifications to get degrees to become teachers, and moving into our workforce from the Bangladeshi community. It was hugely successful.

I do not think we have enough clarity about how we intend to resolve this problem. It is an issue. It is very important that young people see their communities around them. We know that increased diversity strengthens most workforces in whatever you do. Equally, we have an issue with the number of men who want to teach in our primary schools, and that needs to be addressed. It is about the way we not only build the workforce but think deliberately about how we want to build the workforce in particular communities.

I think that the leadership issue is very important. We need to do some direct work on encouraging and supporting a more diverse leadership. I used to do a lot of work in the United States of America. It is so striking how the education community is much more diverse in some parts of the world than others. We should work on that, even though we have a great workforce already. I agree with you on that.

You mentioned after-school faith groups, madrasas, whatever it might be. One of the issues about after-school extended time is the big question of whether you make it a compulsory part of the school day, or voluntary. The evidence indicates that the more voluntary things are, the less likely it is that they will get to the hard-to-reach bits of your community, or into the nooks and crannies you want to get into. If we want to increase the amount of time children spend in school for the richer experience, it should be woven into the curriculum and become part of the compulsory school day for children. That would be how we guarantee that our most disadvantaged communities attend.

It is not quite true with some of our minority communities but, in general, when you make things voluntary, it is the more advantaged children who take advantage of it. We need to ensure that it is for all children, which is why I would tag it into the school day. However, I am conscious of the fact that we do not want to cut off or stymie voluntary activities in communities. We would have to be very careful to ensure that these things are complementary and work together.

Q77 The Lord Bishop of Derby: Sir Kevan, recognising the interest that I have in this area, I want to take you back to your earlier answer on engagement with the support and care for teachers and school leaders. You mentioned specifically the particular burden on our smaller schools.

As you will be aware, a disproportionate number of Church schools are smaller schools. Are you aware of the learning and the practice from the National Society and the Church of England in its Institute for Educational Leadership, and the extraordinary models and practices of support and care for teachers and school leaders through the Church of England's schools network and their diocesan academy trusts? Do you have any reflection on that and how good learning from it could be shared more widely?

Sir Kevan Collins: It is probably stretching beyond my brief as the Recovery Commissioner, but at some point we need to consider the settled state of our education system. As you can probably guess, I am not particularly obsessed with structures—we have been thinking about those a bit too much—and I am much more interested in what goes on in the classroom, although structures obviously matter.

It seems to me that schools being part of some network or some relationship—I am agnostic about whether it is a local education authority, a multi-academy trust or a local diocesan group—is, in a sense, just about belonging. It is having the chance to collaborate, share and engage with each other that really matters.

Place turns out to be much more important than might have been considered. I have been working with the Government on the opportunity areas in places such as Derby, Stoke-on-Trent, Blackpool, and others. Place is hugely important for teachers and families. When we build these networks and structures, where you are is part of the solution, and you think of the assets for children.

I was talking only the other day with colleagues in Greater Manchester about their ability to harness access to transport, leisure facilities and youth facilities, and to think about the broader offer for young people. It is beyond the school gates, into the community and the community assets, and it is in communities of schools. We should really worry about schools that are isolated and alone, which do not belong to anything or are in weak systems.

Q78 Lord Clarke of Nottingham: Sir Kevan, concentrating on people at the end of their school careers—the 15 year-olds, 16 year-olds, 17 year-olds and 18 year-olds who have experienced complete chaos in the GCSE/A-level stage of their education—it seems that we are at last making an attempt to make proper use of our FE colleges. Do you think that there is a case for encouraging FE and sixth-form colleges to provide one-year courses where people can do a year again to prepare them properly for their GCSEs or their A-levels, whichever is the relevant one, so that they can demonstrate what they are actually capable of attaining in an examination of the kind that is normally held, which, as we have seen, is regarded by the public as the only fair way of assessing these things?

Do you think pupils would benefit if they could go to an FE college or a sixth-form college and redo a year—have an extra year, if you like—when they can be taught properly and demonstrate what they can attain?

Sir Kevan Collins: At one level it makes enormous sense, Lord Clarke. However, the evidence on repeating years is not particularly strong. There are a couple of alternatives to put into the pot that we might consider.

We absolutely need to think about the issue—there is no question about that. If we take the A-level group first, these are the people who are going pretty well through the system: good GCSEs, good A-levels, university. Let us call that route one. I have been talking quite a lot to vice-chancellors, and I know that universities are doing quite a lot of work to try to see how to prepare a 101 access course to, say, a physics degree so they can be clear about the content that needs to be covered if they are to be successful on the course. I am preferring this upstream model whereby we ensure you are going to be successful as you go upstream rather than repeating. Many universities are contacting all the young people who are coming to them in the autumn; they are showing them the course structure and having online courses to prepare them. It is a bit like the American university 101 course model—and then you access and thrive at the course. We have to do this for that group.

Then we have a group of young people who have less time to learn. They are at the end of their FE experience and they may not have had the chance, for example, to have had as much time on site to do the practical plumbing course as they need to, and are heading now towards a very difficult labour market. We definitely need to think about that group of young people having the chance of more time. There is already the opportunity for FE principals to support those young people, and we should think about funding the opportunity of another year for those young people, or the time that they need to complete their course.

On the A-level group, those at the end of GCSEs, we could have an ironic moment this year where, after the most disrupted education year of our history, we have the best GCSE results ever.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: But not very credible ones.

Sir Kevan Collins: The point there is about ensuring that at the beginning of the A-level course you are really well prepared. It is a bit like my point about the undergraduate course. Let us take the subject of A-level maths. There is a bit of a cliff edge between GCSE and A-level maths. A-level maths is the A-level that most young people take, which is great news. But we need to ensure that in the gap between GCSE and the beginning of that course and in the first few terms of that course those 60,000-odd young people doing A-level maths are really well supported to ensure that they have the learning that they might have missed at GCSE, to ensure it is in place as they start their A-level.

I prefer doing more work upstream, with extra support, extra tuition and better teaching, to ensure they can access the course rather than repeating years. However, for one group—the group leaving year 13 from FE—we should offer them the chance of another year, if they need it, to complete some of their practical vocational training.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: That is very interesting. As you say, these

people will very possibly combine a chaotic interruption to their normal education with entering a very difficult labour market. This group will require career advice like no generation before, including on what they should be doing and what subjects they should be taking to prepare them best for the career that they want to pursue, if they have a vague or broad notion, or even a precise notion, of what they want to do.

The Government are doing an awful lot on careers. They are recruiting career advisers and everything else. We have career hubs and some very interesting things going on. But is it of the necessary quality to deal with the immense challenges that we will face over the next two or three years? Do you think we have got it right? Is there anything like career hubs that you think are particularly useful for those pupils? We are obviously at the very early stages of all the things that the Government have announced on careers over the last few months. What are we doing to ensure that the quality of this is adequate, and that the people who are providing the careers advice are trained well enough and have enough links with local employers to provide advice of the level we need?

Sir Kevan Collins: It is very fortunate that we face this challenge at the same time as we have built over the last four or five years the work of the Careers & Enterprise Company. That really has shifted, as you quite rightly said, the focus into stronger links with employers, with these hubs around the country, and with buy-in and real engagement from local employers.

I have always been very clear that we need this to be employer driven. I have always been very inspired when I have had the chance to visit and see the work that is done in certain countries, where the choices are employer led. I think that the Careers & Enterprise Company is a fantastic foundation to build on and is where we should invest. We are not building from scratch; we are building on, which is always a better way of going.

Generally, the work that we are doing on the FE White Paper, the work we are doing on T-levels, and this whole renaissance and refocus on FE cannot come soon enough. We need to keep on that. I still think that a lot of young people might go to university because, quite frankly, what else is there to do?

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: There is quite a lot to do.

Sir Kevan Collins: We need more high-level apprenticeships and more high-level training in the vocations and really to build that side. That is the Cinderella bit of our post-16 provision. Thank God that now we are looking at it properly and seriously for once.

Q79 **Lord Clarke of Nottingham:** Thank you very much for that answer, which confirms all my own personal instincts; I am delighted to hear that.

My last question is: do you think that there is a risk that we will see among the most disadvantaged children particularly, or those who have just been very unlucky, an increase in the number who drop out and

become NEETs—not in employment, education or training—which is a terribly difficult problem? What has happened to their schooling will make them never really take up their education again. Whatever is provided for them, some will just vanish off the radar, if we are not careful.

Are we doing enough for that group of people? Are things such as Kickstart relevant, or are there other things that we can do? If you agree with me that there is a risk of that—that an even larger number of the most difficult-to-help children will just drop out—what is the best way of tackling that and minimising the problem?

Sir Kevan Collins: I absolutely agree that this is one of the great risks. We know that the implications of being NEET—that horrible phrase—

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: It is an awful acronym, yes.

Sir Kevan Collins: Yes, the implications are horrendous. But we also know the estimates are that that is a £68,000 cost to the country. It is a waste of potential and a huge lost opportunity for the young person, and for us all.

How do we stop that? I think that the link to Kickstart and how we bridge into Kickstart is very important. My experience of working with young people in that category has always been that you have to get below the numbers and get to the names. I remember very well from my time in east London that you would literally have a list of all the young people who were in that category on your wall, and you would be saying, “We have to deal with them one by one”. This is precision stuff. This is why at the local level, whether it is local authorities or even at a level below, you need people attending to each young person.

On your point, it is so easy: they can just drop out of the system. The warm embrace of the school and the college is lost and they drift and pop up a few years later. How we keep tabs on and engagement with every one of those young people is the task, because we cannot afford not to. There are signs that the number is growing, and we cannot allow that. This bridging into Kickstart is very interesting. We have to ensure that we can convert the Kickstart jobs into apprenticeships at any point. I think that we should pick up on that very quickly. Everything should be done.

I am nervous because I am not quite sure locally—in my old role I was telling you how I did it—who has actually got each of those young people on their desk as their responsibility.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: We know that Kickstart is time limited. Will we need Kickstart for longer than the Government first envisaged?

Sir Kevan Collins: To be honest with you, Lord Clarke, I do not know. If we look to international examples, we see that recovering this kind of loss takes time. I absolutely think that this will take two or three years, and probably through this Parliament. If you take the Katrina event in New Orleans, it took them four years to recover that educational loss. We have seen other examples. I think we should be planning for the medium term for this kind of experience. As you said, the year 10 and year 9

young people have had quite disrupted educations and will be dropping out at the end of this in the next two or three years.

Q80 Lord Empey: It has been alluded to, but is there a risk that employers and universities will stigmatise young people coming out of the two academic years that have been lost? Is there some way of preventing that, because it would be a further injustice that is not within their control?

Sir Kevan Collins: It would be a deep injustice. These young people have done nothing wrong. I guess this is why I have stepped in voluntarily to do this work. We have to do whatever we can to support them. In many ways, they have displayed—this is why I do not like to catastrophise the language—a resilience that is pretty inspiring. The way in which they have remained engaged, the work and studying they are doing, the preparation they are doing and the way they have generally behaved through this pandemic is something that we should recognise and applaud. Yet many of them, as I said earlier, have had key elements of their childhood taken from them. So I think that would be shocking.

As I said, that story has not been told. Alongside the loss, there will be some things that these children have that other children do not have. They will have a resilience and an assurance that we will need to recognise as well—and an independence. Their independent learning skills, for example, have developed in ways that are quite surprising and interesting. This sounds trite, but all of us grown-ups have to support these young people, and anything like that needs to be challenged really firmly.

There is an issue that I should have mentioned earlier to Lord Clarke's point. The group of young people who are vulnerable with disabilities or particular needs have in many ways suffered even more in this, with therapies or visits that have not taken place. Some young people literally have not left their home because of the need to shield. In all of this conversation we need to be mindful of our responsibilities, for all our young people but particularly for the more vulnerable young people. Whether it is extending Kickstart or spending some money on recovery, we have a responsibility now to serve these young people, and that has to come with investment. It is beyond straightforward arguments; there is a moral responsibility.

Q81 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: It is a very quick one, Sir Kevan, to go back to your point about the resilience and admirable behaviour, on the whole, of the cohort of young people we are talking about. Do you agree that it is very important that we do not advertently or inadvertently undermine the credibility of the qualifications that they come away with, because as they go into the labour market they will need to feel, will they not, that the results they have achieved in this period of upheaval have as much value and are viewed with as much credibility as any of their predecessors or those who come after?

Sir Kevan Collins: Absolutely. It is interesting that Lord Woolley was talking about the fact that his 15 year-old son was doing more tests than ever. When you talk to individual schools about what they are doing to

assure the qualification that they are going to award, the amount of evidence they are gathering, the pre-testing they are doing, the use of mocks and the use of previous tests is amazing. People are desperately trying to ensure that they award their young people the right grade, the one they deserve.

We should have as much confidence as we can in that process. As I said earlier to the same point, it cannot be right that the young people end up taking any kind of blame for this. They deserve everything they get, and we need to ensure that upstream they are supported to succeed going forward.

Q82 Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Sir Kevan, thank you very much for really interesting answers to the questions. I just want to check, because we keep on coming back to it, that there is nothing else that you want to raise with us on how you are dealing with young people from deprived or at-risk backgrounds in the recovery. You have been very thorough about that and really interesting, but I just want to check that there is nothing else that you want to tell us about.

Sir Kevan Collins: You probably know, Lord Hall, that we already have a process where we allocate some additional funding to disadvantaged communities through a mechanism called the pupil premium, which is currently about £1,300 for every primary school child and £900 for every secondary school child. The good thing about that mechanism is that it allows you to ensure those resources go to those schools and communities with the greatest need. With the recovery effort, we have to be clear that every child has suffered or had an impact from Covid, but for disadvantaged children it has had a bigger impact. For me the key thing is, as we allocate the resources, that we ensure that we focus on the disadvantaged as well as every child, and not think that this is a level playing field in that regard. I am confident that with the premium and the kind of programme we could put together we could meet the needs of all young people, including the disadvantaged, in this regard.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: My second question goes back to what you were saying so interestingly about a broader curriculum, supporting parents and coming to terms with the fact that all of us—not just teachers and pupils—are going to be in a blended environment, some digital, some physical. In my final few months when I was working at the BBC, we put a huge amount of money and effort into digital learning, using our resources to give teachers, children and parents access to resources. I think that we had between 4 million and 5 million people using it. What is your thinking about what not just broadcasters but cultural and sports institutions and a whole raft of institutions that have found digital audiences could do to help recovery, support teachers and the curriculum, and support parents in helping their children?

Sir Kevan Collins: There must come a moment—pretty soon, hopefully—where we turn away from the screen for a little bit, just for a little while, while we get back into the real world. But literally it will be for a little while, because I think that this blend—I am being hesitant because I do not think that we fully yet really get it—is the way young

people see the world anyway, and the way we should encourage them to see the world.

The key thing is that they are not passive in it—that they are driving and directing the decisions that they make. It takes you into the curriculum again, and we probably do not have time now to discuss that. But it is all about the ability to navigate that with a kind of intelligence, to ensure you are able to discern what is fake and what is not, and you are able to make choices and not be dragged in and led. There is a whole new learning there about living in and navigating a digital world that needs to be embedded into our curriculum. I think that we are a bit behind on that, to be honest with you.

Equally for teachers, there are so many resources now and so much out there. The Government have done this brilliant work creating the Oak National Academy, with lessons online. But we need to ensure that that does not make us passive, because there is something about an authentic and real education that really matters. There is a lot of new learning. Yes, I applaud all those things. They need to be there and we need to engage with it, but we need to open it up and make young people part of it, rather than just consumers of it.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: I think your point about passivity is very well made. Thank you.

Q83 **Lord Storey:** I want to go back to the very beginning when you quite rightly commended the Government for making 1 million laptops available to children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The problem is also connectivity. Poorer families cannot afford the packages that are on offer. There is a real problem with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds going back to school, when a lot of the learning and a lot of the homework is still online. As a country we have to look at how we ensure complete digital inclusion.

Sir Kevan Collins: I completely agree. I should be fair to DfE, I think that it was 1.3 million laptops. Beyond that, by the way, a lot of local academy trusts and local authorities quite rightly used their resources to provide hardware for young people and access. But your point is that the hardware means nothing if you cannot connect it. Who wants a black box in their kitchen? To go back to Oak National Academy and online learning, there are some great conversations and support from many of the data providers to create access for young people, and at no charge to families.

This whole question of access being about both connectivity and the hardware is absolutely right. It will come to be an integral part of not only engaging not only in a democratic society but in learning, because I just cannot see how in the next 20 years we will not see that move another step forward. It is happening right in front of our eyes.

Interestingly, England has been great on the hardware side, but we are not a frontrunner necessarily in the way technology is woven into the experience for young people and their learning. We are catching up a lot, but how we create a blended opportunity will define the great education

systems of the future, and I am really glad that we are now moving forward on it much more quickly than we were.

The Chair: Sir Kevan, on behalf of the committee, I thank you enormously for your contribution. It has been hugely helpful to our deliberations. If you think of something afterwards that you wish you had said, please write it down and send it to the secretariat. We are taking evidence and considering it until the end of July. If anything new emerges in that time that you would wish to draw to our attention, we will be very happy to receive it and consider it. On behalf of the committee, I extend warm thanks to you for your contribution to us today.