Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Left Behind White Pupils from Disadvantaged Backgrounds](#), HC 279

Tuesday 13 October 2020

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Apsana Begum; Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; David Johnston; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 1-73

Witnesses

[I](#): Professor Lee Elliot Major OBE, Professor of Social Mobility, University of Exeter, Diane Reay, Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Cambridge and Professor Matthew Goodwin, Professor of Politics and International Relations, University of Kent.

[II](#): Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation, Mary Curnock Cook OBE, and Dr Sam Baars, Director of Research and Operations, Centre for Education and Youth.

Written evidence from witnesses:

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Lee Elliot Major OBE, Professor of Social Mobility, University of Exeter, Diane Reay, Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Cambridge, and Professor Matthew Goodwin, Professor of International Relations, University of Kent.

Chair: Good morning, everyone. It is good to have you here for our first evidence session on White working-class boys and girls left behind. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on parliamentlive.tv, will the witnesses introduce themselves and their positions?

Professor Goodwin: My name is Matthew Goodwin. I am Professor of Politics at Rutherford College, University of Kent, and Associate Fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House.

Professor Reay: I am Diane Reay, Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Cambridge, and Visiting Professor of Sociology at the LSE.

Professor Elliot Major: I am the Professor of Social Mobility at the University of Exeter, Lee Elliot Major.

Q1   **Chair:** Are you happy to be called by your first names during the session? Yes? Thank you.

To start, will you set out the state of play in terms of the statistics regarding White working-class boys and girls, and their under-attainment throughout the education system, compared with other disadvantaged groups? Will you also set out the statistics on whether that has been getting better or worse over the past five years?

Professor Elliot Major: I can talk a little about the basic benchmarks at age 16. The definition has changed from year to year, unfortunately, but we know that about a third of White pupils on free school meals get the basic benchmark of five GCSEs with English and maths. From what I can tell looking at the data, that has stayed pretty much the same for a number of years now. My reading generally of the data is that they are stuck almost at that sort of level, while we have seen other groups progress—we have looked at that, which has been great. In my view, looking back at the 2014 Education Committee report, it is depressing reading. I would say that there has been no gain since then.

Professor Reay: The gap between free school meal pupils and other pupils increased at secondary and early years in 2018. In 2019, it also increased at primary level, for the first time since 2007. Whereas it was on a plateau for a while, we have concerning signs that it may be going up.

Q2   **Chair:** Are we talking specifically about White working-class boys and girls?

Professor Reay: Yes.

Q3   **Chair:** Do you have any other statistics that you would like to set out about lower attainment through the education system?

Professor Reay: Obviously, comparisons are often made between the White group and different ethnic minority groups. There is a sense that this has played into the regional difference as well, in that London is doing a lot better than other regional areas, particularly in the north, because of its ethnic diversity. We have statistics to show that poorer children, even those on free school meals, are from a range of different ethnic backgrounds other than White, and they are often doing better.

Professor Goodwin: I suggest that the statistical case for White disadvantaged children being left behind is not a difficult one to make. Looking at, for example, the report from the Education Committee in 2014, even then the picture was fairly clear. More recent data would appear to suggest, first, that this particular group of White British kids on free school meals not only are still towards the bottom of the ladder, usually eclipsed only by children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage, but also appear to have been overtaken in some cases by groups from other backgrounds, which have made more progress over the past five to six years.

One statistic, for example, that struck me over the past couple of weeks was in the latest data from the Department for Education's national pupil database, which suggest that if you look at the percentage of 15-year-old state-funded pupils who were in higher education four years later—by the age of 19, and those children having been children on free school meals— then the figures for White British kids are 13% for boys and 19% for girls They are eclipsed by, for example, Chinese kids on free school meals, at 66%, Black African boys on free school meals, at 51%, and Pakistani boys on free school meals, at 42%.

The differences are enormous. The statistical case overall is not a difficult one to make. If anything, I think that the picture has deteriorated since the 2014 report.

Q4   **Chair:** May I ask you all, why is that the case? I would really like you to be as open as possible on this, because often people refuse to discuss it. Why is there that under-attainment by disadvantaged White working-class boys and girls, compared with many other cohorts? Be as full and open as possible on this point. Let us start with you, Diane, please.

Professor Reay: We need to look at the history of the educational system and to ask ourselves whether we started out intending to educate and empower working-class children. We look at the history, and we can see that it was mainly about controlling what was seen at the time as an unruly, disreputable group. That history dogs us still in the present. We currently have a hyper-competitive, individualised education system that does not play well to the strengths of White working-class children. We need really to look at what we are offering them, and we also need to question seriously and focus on powerful knowledge. Who exactly is this knowledge for?

Q5   **Chair:** May I intervene on that? That is not the why; that is some solutions. I want to understand the why. Why is this going on?

Professor Reay: I think that a narrow, elitist, exclusive curriculum does not work well in enabling working-class children to succeed through the system.

Chair: That does not explain why some groups are doing better under that. You have working-class people from ethnic groups who are doing much better.

Professor Reay: We also need to look at their histories and their histories of migration. Some ethnic groups have come from countries where their families have had generations of educational success, and they have social and cultural capital in their countries of origin, even though they may be economically impoverished by the move here. People from other countries come because they are desperate to make a new start and enable their children to succeed in a new system. Then we get Black Caribbean British young people who have had quite a number of generations in this country and have become quite like the White working class in the extent they have experienced a lot of failure through the system, and in their case that is compounded by racism. There are very different histories of educational experiences for different ethnic groups.

Professor Elliot Major: I would agree with what Diane is saying, and I would add that, of course, poverty disadvantage is a big factor for all these groups, whether you are White or whatever. What is particularly an issue for some of these White working-class communities is that they live in places where there are not many opportunities. I still think we are recovering from the demise of the manufacturing industry post-war, and we have not actually had a proper plan, whether it is about addressing job opportunities in those areas of the country or, as Diane says, about the curriculum and the offering in the school place. These issues go back decades in terms of the particular issues for White working-class people.

Q6   **Chair:** Okay, but other cohorts live in those communities too, with the lack of manufacturing. It is not just the White working class.

Professor Elliot Major: Yes, but there are multi-generational issues for these families, where parents and grandparents will have had poor experiences in education, as well as the children. That has a profound impact on attitudes towards schooling. We will probably get into this more, but if you do not tackle that fundamental issue—

Chair: I know, but you are still not answering the why. I feel that both of you are being political in not answering. Everything that you have just said applies to every other cohort; it does not specifically apply to why there is under-attainment in White working-class groups. I think we deserve a specific answer to that question.

Professor Elliot Major: I am sorry, but I don't think it does apply to all groups at all. I don't think multi-generational poor experiences of schooling do not apply to all groups, Rob. As Diane was saying, these are

different experiences. I am not being political at all.

Q7   **Chair:** I will come on to Matthew in a second. What is the difference between a White working-class boy and girl in a poorer community and somebody from an ethnic background in a poorer community? Statistics suggest that, on the whole, those from that ethnic background are doing much better, except possibly for Afro-Caribbean and Roma people, as Diane pointed out. What is the difference?

Professor Elliot Major: The point is that those White communities will have been there for a long time. There is multi-generational persistence within those particular areas of the country in terms of poor experiences of schooling. That is a particular issue for those particular communities.

Professor Goodwin: If we were summarising everything we know—I think our debate already reflects this—there are three answers to your question, Rob. The first is that we would look at institutions—we would look at schools and teaching as being the problem. But, as you say, that does not account for cross-group variation—for why some are doing better, and why, over the past few years, some groups have been doing much better than these kids. The second group of explanations is individual: that there is something about cognitive ability, about the individual students themselves, that has left them ill prepared and is perhaps reflected in the curriculum.

The third group of explanations—which, to be honest, probably goes further than the rest, but we still need a bit of work on—are the cultural explanations. What is it that is happening outside of the school environment, that is happening perhaps not only within the family but within society, that is sending these kids the message that higher education or pursuing further education is not for them? Speaking quite candidly, I would argue that that is reflected in our national conversation, for example, which gives these kids what I would call a status deficit. Over the last 10 years, our national conversation has become much more consumed with other groups in society, and as academics like Peter Hall at Harvard and others have shown, that has led the White working class in particular to feel as though they are not being given as much recognition and esteem as others.

That does not explain this entire problem, Rob, but at a macro, national level, it is absolutely part of the explanation for why even the parents and grandparents of these kids are feeling as though they are not being given sufficient levels of status and respect in wider society, and in a society that—let's be honest—really only gives status to university graduates. If you want to pursue other forms of vocational and technical education, as I am sure we will get into, you are generally not treated with the same degree of respect and status as others in society.

Professor Reay: I agree with that, Matthew. There are growing levels of social resentment and a sense of being left behind among the White working classes, and research shows us very high levels of polarisation, particularly between highly credentialled groups—those of us with

degrees—and those people who leave school with very few qualifications. There is a lack of understanding and empathy for the class other among all class groups, but it has the most power to injure, and have a detrimental effect on, those with the least power in society, those who see themselves as educational failures and losers.

Q8   **Chair:** How many of you feel it is something to do with what goes on at home—family issues or whatever it may be?

Professor Elliot Major: There is a lot of debate about lack of aspirations, which we will probably get into. I challenge that a little bit, because for me, the data suggests that it is the schooling. Many of these families do have aspirations; it is just that they do not see the current education system as fulfilling those aspirations. That is pretty clear from what the research says. So the home environment is absolutely key in all this, but I do not think it is just about lack of aspiration. I think it is that they perceive education as not a vehicle for moving on in life.

Q9   **Chair:** Lee, you said that we also need to challenge the assumption that the White working class is one homogenous cultural group. In essence, you are saying that you cannot have a uniform solution to this, and that, actually, it is very different. Can you just explain what you mean? I will then ask the other witnesses to comment, before passing over to my colleagues.

Professor Elliot Major: One of the tendencies in this debate is to assume, because we are talking about a big group of pupils, that the same issues apply to Blackpool, inner-city Sunderland and rural Devon, for example. The White working-class communities are across the country, and my worry sometimes about these debates is that we generalise across the country. The place and community in which you live has a profound impact on your aspirations and attitudes towards education, and we still do not know enough about that.

Q10   **Chair:** Matthew, do you want to comment on that at all?

Professor Goodwin: I broadly agree with everything that Lee has said. The challenge that we have is that, in politics, policy and academia, we tend to look at institutions because they are the easiest to do something with. You can change what we teach these kids in school. We can do things to make sure that we give incentives to good teachers to stay in disadvantaged areas. The problem is that the vast majority of time that these kids have is actually taking place outside of the school.

I do not like reducing this to anecdote, but as a kid from a single-parent background and a low-income family, I can say that, for me, mentorship is incredibly important. The literature speaks to this as well. We need to think much more seriously about starting mentoring programmes much earlier and accepting the fact, to speak to Diane's point, that for some children the education system is not necessarily there, and nor should it be, just to funnel them into university. It should also be there to encourage and promote vocational and technical programmes much earlier, as they do in Germany and Switzerland, to start that as quickly as

possible and to accept that, for some children, the end goal is not a Russell Group university, and nor should it be, but an alternative form of education.

I think mentorship and mentoring could play a role in that earlier on in life. For example, if it were not for a history teacher at a critical moment in my life, I would have left school and gone straight to work for a fast-food restaurant—100%. Had it not been for that intervention in the context of a single-parent family, where the father was absent, then that life journey would have been very different. As I read the literature, and the work of Lee, Diane and others, I think that speaks very loudly. We have to get into the cultural and family questions as much as the institutional ones.

Q11   **Kim Johnson:** As a Black child growing up in one of the most deprived wards in Liverpool, I was always told by my parents that I had to work twice as hard as my White counterparts. Lee has just mentioned that some parents do not see education as a vehicle for moving on in life, but a lot of Black parents do see education as a route out of poverty. Does the panel think that the idea of White privilege has anything to do with this level of underachievement?

Professor Reay: That is a difficult one. Growing up as a White working-class child, I was always told that I had to work twice as hard and be twice as good as my middle-class peers. I think there are obviously issues around White privilege, but with the work that I have done in White working-class communities, those parents and their children don't have any sense of being powerful and having any power, either in the educational system or in wider society. It is obviously being played out in ways that are quite difficult to understand and get at.

Chair: Kim, is that okay?

Professor Goodwin: May I come in? When I referred to the national conversation and the emerging narrative that we have about our society, ideas like White privilege are part of that. I would ask a question back, which is what do we even mean by that? What is the empirical evidence that, for these children, this is a salient and relevant concept? If we are now going to start teaching them in schools that not only do they have to overcome the various economic and social barriers within their communities, but they also need to now start apologising for simply belonging to a wider group, which also strips away their individual agency, then I think we are just going to compound many of these problems.

When you look at the statistical evidence on this problem, as I have over the last two weeks, and you go into these communities and try to tell them that they are suffering from White privilege, it seems to me to be a completely nonsensical response to the problem. Statistically, they aren't. Statistically, they are way behind everybody else, and they are falling through the cracks.

We need to be very careful about how we are going to set up this conversation about very legitimate issues over racism, injustice and so on.

To try and suggest that this group also now should be apologising for expressing themselves because of their wider group membership could be quite catastrophic, actually.

Q12 **Tom Hunt:** I completely agree with everything you just said there, Matthew. It is very important. Parity of esteem between academic education and technical education is definitely a key part of this. Is it not really about trying to get the balance right? Not saying that if you are from a White working-class background, you should not aspire to go to a Russell Group university and you should not aspire to be academically successful—that option should be open—but at the same time, having a good-quality, technical offering as well. The danger is that you swing from one extreme to another.

One approach would be to say we are just going to have a completely academic route and say that is going to be the sole focus. The other route is to say that if you are from a White working-class background, the academic route is not for you and we are going to offer a good technical education. Ultimately, it is about having multiple pathways and parity of esteem between the academic and the technical. That has been a huge failing of our education system. I agree that White working-class young people have paid the price for that more than anyone, but others have done as well.

Professor Elliot Major: I am sure we are going to get into this. I absolutely agree with that. It is as if we have created a narrow academic race and we have said that is the only game in town, which I think it is, at the moment, in terms of status. And then we are saying to many communities, "By the way, it is going to be almost impossible for you to win this race unless you are middle class and have all the resources to win that race, and by the way, if you are living in those communities, you are going to have to move out to get a decent job." I am being provocative, but I think we have created a system that is unwinnable. In many ways, it is a rational response to step out of the race, rather than try to compete in it. I think we need to tackle the poor system that we have for technical vocational education. That said, it does not mean that just because you are from a working-class background it is the only route you pursue, but you have to address both the jobs in those local communities and having a credible vocational education system.

Q13 **David Simmonds:** My question is about the data. Reflecting on what the panel have said, it seems that the aim of having data is to try to bring some objectivity into the discussion. What I am hearing is that creating cohort data that is meaningful for any one of the groups that we have been talking about—Black children, White working-class left-behind—is quite a challenge. The starting point of this inquiry was using the term "White working-class" as a proxy for White British pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Do you think that is in any way a useful and meaningful way forward?

Given your knowledge of data and research, is there anything internationally that we could draw on, given that most other countries

have broadly similar challenges within their population—they have groups that they would regard as left behind, where they are trying to level up and to create opportunity? Is there something that you would recommend that we look at that other countries have done, either in terms of the outcomes that they are achieving across the cohort of children who are going through the system, or specific interventions that they have put in place that we might then apply to our situation in the United Kingdom? While people argue that class is a bit of a British obsession, we do have broadly similar data that looks at socio-economic groups, income levels and all the rest of it, which underpins that and I hope might make it possible to make some meaningful comparisons.

Professor Elliot Major: I think a pragmatic thing for the Committee to do is to look at free school meals eligibility. I would probably look at what we call ever-FSM, which is whether someone has been on free school meals at some point in their education.

There are limitations to that though. We have lots of data on that: it is a binary measure; it does not pick up the regional place variation that I talked about earlier. There are some pupils that are under much more disadvantage over a longer time period than others that would both be classified as free school meals, so I think it is limited, but it is pragmatic for you to use that. I would look at things in terms of class analysis—Diane has done some great stuff on this—because I think that picks up on things like attitudes towards education, which you do not get from just the free school meals analysis. In terms of recommendations, I would plead for you to look at the example of Australia over the last 20 or 30 years. In my view—again, I have not visited there; this is reading reports on what they have done—their vocational system in schooling is very successful. Schools have partnerships with local colleges and employers. Head teachers there will talk about vocational success as much as academic success. They have got it right or better than we do, and that is because it has status as well as being a very good system.

Professor Reay: The IFS research shows that free school meals does not capture half of the one fifth of the poorest people in British society. In some ways, it is too narrow an indicator. It is also very unstable at the moment. There are huge applications for free school meals under covid, so it would be good to try to think of something that is a more accurate measure of deprivation and disadvantage in society.

Professor Goodwin: Free school meals is, as Lee said, a useful proxy, but the numbers are still quite small. Diane and Lee might correct me, but I think that if you take White British children on free school meals at GCSE level, you are looking at around 50,000 students or thereabouts, which is a fairly small number. If we were to do something useful—this echoes Diane's point—perhaps we might want to look at what is pushing White British children who are not on free school meals but might still fall within the disadvantaged category. What is it that is leading them to perhaps do a little better than their free school meal counterparts? That would be some useful comparative research. Secondly, can we get more voice from those 50,000 free school meal children? Can we hear a bit more from

them about why it is that they are falling out of the education system or not performing as well as we might hope? Those are two very useful projects that might actually get us a bit further.

Professor Elliot Major: I am currently doing some research with colleagues on the inequalities during the covid pandemic. We are looking at the income spectrum. That is something we can provide the Committee with. I have to say that my worry is—we have not got all the data yet—that particular areas of the country will be hit particularly in terms of education and unemployment inequality, which will affect these communities.

Q14   **David Simmonds:** None of the three witnesses has addressed the point about international research. Are there specific examples of countries or systems that have got this right, which we could reflect on and draw into our thing?

Professor Goodwin: Can I briefly come in? I have not looked on the ground at the actual initiatives, but if I were to start, I would be looking at—apart from Lee's point about Australia—the vocational experience in countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland, where you have a much larger proportion of children in second schools studying and pursuing vocational strands of education from a much earlier point. That would be a useful start.

David Simmonds: It is a topic to return to later.

Chair: Absolutely. Perhaps we can ask the next panel the same question.

Q15   **Dr Johnson:** I have a couple of questions that are related to what Matthew and Lee said. It was mentioned at the beginning that a third of students on free school meals are getting five GCSEs and two thirds are not, and that that is fairly static. What research has been done to look at the third who do succeed, to see how they may differ from those who do not?

Professor Reay: This is not an area that I know a great deal about. The research that we did on White working-class young people who went on to elite universities showed that they were atypical, in terms of being White working class, in that they had smaller families and slightly higher incomes. They were more likely to afford the middle-class activities that middle-class parents pay for. Some had private tuition, and they had some of the enrichment activities.

It goes back to Lee's point: there is a lot of diversity and difference within the category of White working class. A lot of the students who did well and went on to élite universities were slightly more advantaged, in terms of both economic and cultural capital. They were not in the really hard-up disadvantaged group on the whole.

Professor Goodwin: Briefly, just to give people a sense of the numbers, when we say that these children are going to elite universities, we are essentially talking about less than 2% or thereabouts. Over 70% of White

British children on free school meals who make it to university go to what we call a low-tariff university, where typically the entrance requirements are much less. This goes back to Lee's point. Even when they play the game right, in terms of our meritocracy, and go into the higher education system, in a sense they are still being left behind relative to others because when they come out the other side, with their CVs and so on, and are going into the employment sector, they are overwhelmingly not likely to have gone to the top-tier selective institutions. They are facing these double whammies as they go up through the system, even if, ironically, they are making it up the system. We just need to keep a sense of perspective in place.

Dr Johnson: Matthew talked about the focus on other groups, and someone shared with me some UCAS data looking at children who go to university by gender, ethnicity and whether they are on free school meals. One of the noticeable things is that the groups least likely to go are White males on free school meals, followed by White females on free school meals, but White males who are not on free school meals do worse than all the other groups that are not on free school meals, and also worse than Asian, mixed and Black males who are on free school meals. Essentially, they are doing worse than children who are on free school meals, if you see what I mean. Why do you think that White children in general seem to be doing more poorly than other ethnic groups, whether they are on free school meals or not?

Chair: That is the question I was trying to get an answer to at the beginning. No one is more passionate about vocational education than me, but I do not think that is the answer to improve the prestige of our vocational education system and have parity of esteem. That is what you all seem to be saying.

Q16 **Dr Johnson:** The second half of the question is this. We see from the UCAS data that White children—particularly boys—seem to be doing more poorly in terms of the entrance requirements, regardless of whether they are on free school meals or not. You talked about status deficit. Do you think that universities' drive and focus to admit more students from particular other groups has disadvantaged White children? Is that part of the reason that they are not going, or do you think it is not relevant?

Professor Elliot Major: I do not think it is relevant, to be honest with you. I really worry about the idea that some groups have dislodged others at university. I have seen no evidence of that. You have to put this in perspective. Disadvantage outside the school gates drives much of this for all groups, irrespective of their colour or race.

I urge the Committee to look into the White community in more detail, because you are basically averaging across the whole system. I would look at income across that spectrum, and place—where these communities are. It is a huge group that you are talking about, so I slightly worry about these comparisons with 80% or 90% of the population against the rest. You have to be a bit careful there.

Rob, I keep coming back to this and I do not know why you do not get it. For me, it is about the place you live. Many of these communities, whether they are on free school meals or just above the free school meal bracket, face issues of unemployment in their areas. There aren't jobs, and there is an education system that they do not perceive as enabling them to get on in the world.

Q17 **Chair:** I get that, but there are other cohorts living in those communities but getting better outcomes.

Professor Elliot Major: But they do not suffer the same multi-generational issues that these communities have had and the deep cultural divide with the current education system. I think that these are things that are much more complex than those simple comparisons.

Q18 **Dr Johnson:** To come back, we know that in the early years there was already a gap in attainment by the time children started school, but we also know that children from ethnic groups that are not White children are more likely to start school having spoken more than one language. So, perhaps that theoretically would put them at a disadvantage rather than an advantage, yet they outperform their White counterparts. How do you explain that? And do the children from the White working-class backgrounds fall further behind, or do they just maintain their position because they are behind already?

Professor Goodwin: I think that is a fantastic question. I think it is not only children who speak English as a second language; you can also find data that shows that children who have been through council care have also then gone on to outperform other White British children on free school meals.

As for the question, "Why?", again it would be lovely to say there is this one factor that explains that all, but to me it is the institutions, the individuals and then the cultural factors. And where we do not seem to know as much as we should, just from my experience of reading the evidence it comes down to the family and local cultural factors that are surrounding the child in those early years.

For example, that would explain why, by the age of five, many of these children are already being left behind, before they have even had a chance to go through teaching and experiencing different levels of teaching and different quality of schools. From my perspective, that is the most important indicator in saying that there is something going on within the household and surrounding the household. What we need—I know that it is a cliché for a researcher to say we need more research, but what we need is to understand that family socialisation process in much greater detail and depth than we currently do, because I think that we have got the institutional part pretty well mapped.

I think that we know that if you get good teachers and you get them to stay in schools, and we get the after-school tuition and we get the mentoring, and we get all of the extracurricular activities, that that all makes a big difference. But even still, there is something happening

beyond that, where I think we really need to go and look at. And of course, whenever people mention "family" or "culture", obviously people get quite cautious about that, but I think we just need to try and push on through, and try to shine some light on that.

Q19   **Dr Johnson:** There is one last thing before I finish, Chair. Matthew, you just talked about "individuals", and earlier you mentioned cognitive ability. Am I misunderstanding you, or are you suggesting that this group's cognitive ability is not the same as that of others?

Professor Goodwin: No, I am not. I am saying that if you are trying to explain why these groups are falling through, I think it makes sense to consider institutional explanations, schooling and teaching, and individual-level explanations. What is it that might be hindering or impacting upon the individual growth of these students, which may be related to parenting or early years, and whatever else? That was simply all that I was suggesting there.

Chair: Okay. I just want to bring in Fleur Anderson, who has a specific question on the definition. Then, very quickly, I will go to Jonathan, and then I promise that we will get to you, Ian. It is a high-demand session.

Q20   **Fleur Anderson:** I am as keen as everyone to move on to the solutions, but I will just pause for a second or two again on the problem and the definition of the problem.

Right at the beginning, I think that it was Lee who was talking about measuring GCSEs and the number—one third—getting five GCSEs. Is that the best measure, or are there other measures that can bring into play some of the things you have been talking about, such as different places and early years versus later attainment? What is the best way that we should define this problem, whereby we can determine how we got to the problem? So, is it GCSEs? Is it university—going on to third tier? Is it about a primary school and secondary school increase in attainment? Can we come to any of those proxies for attainment, which also cover the regional differences and gender differences that we have started to talk about as well?

Chair: May I ask you to give concise answers? Diane, please.

Professor Reay: White working-class children are nine months behind at the end of primary school, which increases to 18.1 at the end of secondary school—and 40% of the learning loss at the end of primary school is there when they start school. That tells us a lot. It tells us that the educational system is actually increasing the differences, but also that we really need to look at early years provision and getting that in place.

Chair: The early years are incredibly important. Do the others want to say something briefly? Matthew? No. Lee?

Professor Elliot Major: I would look at a number of attainment measures. I would look at whether children are getting a 4 in their GCSEs. This is the current pass, if you like. I would look at the basket of GCSE measures, which basically is about whether you get into a sixth form or

not. There is a number of things that you would need to look at, including whether you get basic literacy at the end of primary school. I would look at those measures. There is lots of data by place, by free school meals and so on. So I would look at a range of key benchmarks.

Chair: Very quickly, if you can, Jonathan, because Ian has been waiting a very long time.

Q21 **Jonathan Gullis:** Sorry, Chair, and sorry, Ian; I do apologise. I am basically going on from what Fleur was saying about the early years. We know the fact that people from poor White British households are less likely to access early years education. Does the panel think that we need to start looking at having nursery schools, not nursery provision, in areas like the one that I represent, Stoke-on-Trent, which has a high amount of White working-class deprivation?

Professor Reay: Definitely.

Professor Elliot Major: More place-based, focused in different parts of the country—absolutely. I don't think it is going to solve all the issues, but we definitely need it.

Professor Goodwin: I completely agree.

Chair: Diane, you agree?

Professor Reay: Yes, absolutely.

Chair: Ian, the floor is yours.

Q22 **Ian Mearns:** We need Sure Start Plus, don't we, in all those areas where we have that problem? I remember that, over 20 years ago, when I was on the Local Government Association education committee, we did look at the relevance of the curriculum to young people's lives and their own settings, and we did produce a report back then, from the LGA education executive, called "Success in Something Is Better than Failure in Everything", which I think we were quite proud of, because it was all about the unfairness of the current system.

Listening to you today, I am hearing quite clearly that grandparental and parental life and work experience and levels of educational achievement are significant determinants of what happens to an awful lot of youngsters out there. I am wondering this as well: is free school meals eligibility a sufficiently comprehensive measure of disadvantage? Even when we did that report 20-odd years ago, we tried to look for something else and we regarded free school meals as a broad brush and probably not targeted or effective enough. We also know that eligibility for free school meals is itself a movable determinant. Changes to benefit systems, income thresholds—they have all changed over the years. Therefore, looking at youngsters who are entitled to free school meals probably isn't enough, because in many neighbourhoods where those youngsters are concentrated, you also live cheek by jowl with youngsters who are just above thresholds for eligibility, and they have their own

problems.

One thing that we did look at in a previous Committee was that in, I think, the Netherlands, they looked at prior educational achievement of parents as a determinant. Might that be something useful in terms of trying to finesse this? I just can't help but draw the conclusion that free school meals eligibility on its own is not actually refined enough.

Professor Elliot Major: It's interesting, isn't it, because we have had discussion about whether it's refined enough, or is it big enough, actually? I don't think there is any one answer to this. I think you do look at free school meals eligibility. I would look at "ever FSM"—whether a child has been on free school meals at any point—and that gives you about 22% of the population, but I would also look at analysis, and we can provide some of this. I would look at the two bottom quintiles of the income spectrum, the 40%, and that would correlate roughly with the bottom social classes as defined by sociologists. So I think there is a broader group that you need to look at that would cover disadvantaged fully and encompass what we think of as White working class. It is very interesting. When public surveys are done, some 60% of people classify themselves as working class, so you have to be really careful with those definitions, but personally I would look at that broader grouping of the 40%.

Professor Goodwin: If you are just looking at this question of how we can make things better, as a group to focus on and to narrow down and explore, White British children on free school meals makes sense, but I understand the concern about widening it out so that you capture a larger number of children. Where I would probably suggest you do not go down is where there is a lot of research now saying, "Let's just look at the educational background of parents", or, "Let's just look at the occupational status of parents." The more that we remove ourselves from the direct experience of these children, the more distant we will come from the actual problem.

Q23   **Ian Mearns:** Is it not a fact, however, that—I am a school governor and I come across parents all the time—White working-class people are not a homogenous group? There are many shared traits among people in particular communities, but there is a huge amount of divergence. For some kids, quite honestly from my experience, sometimes the most negative influence educationally on the kids is the parents themselves.

Professor Goodwin: This is what I was referring to earlier when I said that one of the useful things that I think we could do is really take the lid off and explore family and local culture as possible explanations for what we see in the data. Typically, we tend for obvious reasons to focus more on institutions, teaching, schooling and so on, but, as you say, there is something clearly going on outside of that, and we have to remember all the time that most kids spend most of their time away from the institutions that we spend most of our time talking about. That in itself underlines the need to go beyond perhaps where we are looking.

Professor Reay: I just wanted to say that the IFS analysis clearly shows we do not capture the grouping we need to look at. As Lee says, it is much

broader. I want to try and draw back from blaming White working- class parents for their children's educational failure. We need to look at the system and what we, the people who have succeeded through the educational system and have power and resources, can do to make that system work for a group who feel that it is just not working for them at all at the moment. We have not talked much about social cohesion, and we need to think about the growing lack of social cohesion. If we look at the latest survey, we are falling down the league table of stable societies and communities. We need to start to address that primarily through schooling and education.

Ian Mearns: There is a difference between actually witnessing something and blaming someone for the predicament that they are in. From the perspective of a trait rather than a broad-brush thing, there are many families where education itself is regarded as highly important, but there are other families, sadly, where they just do not see the relevance, having been failed by the education system themselves.

Q24   **Fleur Anderson:** What evidence is there for the link between different housing situations—overcrowding and other housing issues—and attainment in schools? How can we weigh that up as one of the factors in the mix?

Professor Goodwin: I have not seen any specific research on that. Lee and Diane may have thoughts. I would also like to see more research on the role of family breakdown and educational outcomes within this community. We have yet to mention that. I think Diane alluded to it when she referred to cohesion and stability, but I would like to see what is going on within these households, in terms of single-parent background and family breakdown as well.

Professor Reay: In relation to home-learning environments, there is actually some research that started as a result of covid. I think covid really highlighted the enormous inequalities in home-learning environments. Lots of poorer children in our society were left without the space necessary to do all that home learning under lockdown. However, I do not think that research has come up with any conclusions yet. It is ongoing research into what has been identified as a serious problem—lack of space.

Q25   **Chair:** There are, sadly, too many people who live in poor-quality housing, but that does not explain specifically the lower attainment for disadvantaged White boys and girls. Lee, do you want to briefly comment on that?

Professor Elliot Major: Only to say that we know that overcrowded conditions in housing are associated with poorer educational attainment. However, it is exactly as you say—we know that that applies to all disadvantaged children. I do not know of any evidence that that is specifically an issue for the White working class.

Q26   **Tom Hunt:** This is for Lee. In your submission, you claim that few education topics have attracted as much attention, controversy and frustration as the underachievement of White working-class pupils. What

do you think are the barriers to progress on this issue?

In the written submissions we received, the Prisoners' Education Trust was asked about this issue specifically, but came back talking about someone from a BAME background being more likely to be in custody and so on. There almost seems to be a sense that we cannot look at this issue, and that it is not okay to look at this issue. Maybe that is part of the problem. What are your thoughts on that?

Professor Goodwin: My view, as I alluded to previously, is that we are witnessing an evolution in how we talk about groups within society. On a more philosophical level, we are seeing liberalism move away from an overarching national collective identity to becoming a philosophy that is increasingly preoccupied with why groups are different from one another. That discussion is primarily anchored around gender, race and ethnicity, and is typically focused on historic grievances within Black and minority ethnic communities. I referred to there being a status deficit. I agree with Lee completely when he said earlier that we should never pit groups against one another, but I argue that, as a consequence of this change in the national conversation, we have inadvertently legitimised a view within some of these communities that they are not treated with the same degree of status, respect and recognition as others.

My fear now is that, with the onset of new terms such as "toxic masculinity" and "White privilege", this will actually become more of a problem, as we send yet another signal to those communities that they are the problem—that it is not the system more generally that let them down but that they are now the problem and should make amends for simply being who they are. That would be a very dangerous turn of events.

Professor Reay: I agree with that. I think that for too long there has been a focus on certain groups in society being a problem, rather than a more collective responsibility of those with power and expertise to try to identify and work with those groups to help them put things right. I think that is what is happening in relation to the education system, too. We see the White working class as a problem, and that that is their own fault. There is a lot of blaming the victim, but I think it is a collective responsibility that we all need to take on board and address.

Chair: Thank you. Lee, briefly, please.

Professor Elliot Major: Yes, I agree with those comments. Is the problem us or them, if I can put it like that? I think that we need to transform the education system quite profoundly. If we don't introduce more vocational options earlier in school, the Committee will be here in six years' time with the same statistics as we looked at six years ago. Tinkering with the education system will not solve these profound issues.

Chair: Tom, do you want to come back?

Tom Hunt: No, I think that is bang on the question. My point was that in some of the submissions they did not even answer the question. They just

talked about BAME communities. Yes, we can look at that, but we can also look at this. Why can't you look at both? It seemed quite strange to me.

Chair: To be clear, we will be looking at other left-behind groups in future inquiries. It is the whole theme of our Committee over the coming year.

Q27 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning again, panel. I have two questions about identifying the causes, challenges and solutions. The causes of underachievement are complex and multifactorial, but it is evident that a significant majority of young people who underachieve at 16-plus have backgrounds characterised by disadvantage and poverty. What do you think are the main reasons that disadvantaged White pupils tend to underperform in education? To what extent are these drivers specifically related to ethnicity rather than to class or socioeconomic status?

Professor Elliot Major: I think it is about place, Kim. It is about where communities live. It is about the fact that there are few job opportunities in many of the communities that we are talking about. As I keep going on about, these are multi-generational issues. Where parents and grandparents have also had poor experiences of education, it leads to a choice—in some ways, I believe it is rational—to reject the education system, which is not winning for them at all.

Professor Goodwin: As you say, we need to appreciate that there is not one single factor that can explain the problem. We need a multivariate analysis. Unfortunately, our conversation about these issues is going in the other direction: we are simply focusing on race and ethnicity as an explanation of everything. We need to try to do whatever we can to get away from that. Some of the issues that we have pointed to during the discussion apply to all communities. As the Chair said in his opening, that still does not adequately account for the differential outcomes that we are seeing in the data.

For me, to highlight one point I have made in this session, we will inevitably have to do a lot more work in how non-institutional factors are affecting these children. By that, I mean what is happening within the family and the local culture, which is perhaps driving these children in a different direction from their non-White counterparts, who have, thankfully, made remarkable progress over the past 10 years. I would argue that one of the success stories of Britain is that progress: we have seen Black African, Chinese, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children make a hell of a lot of progress over the past 10 years. That shows us that something is going right in our education system—it is not all negative—but we still have this real problem.

Chair: Thank you. I hope we will touch in future sessions on what you said about what could be going on in the family. Diane, could you respond briefly please? We are running over time.

Professor Reay: I want to say that being working-class or being from any ethnicity is not a barrier to educational success in and of itself. Being poor, however, is a serious barrier, and one that we must tackle if we will have

White working-class educational success in our educational system. We have stalling social mobility. It has almost ground to a halt, so we need to address this now and not, as Lee said, have to come back in 10 years' time and address it all over again.

Q28 **David Johnston:** Just quickly, Lee, I take your point on place, but you know, like I do, that one of the places poor white children are doing worst is in leafy suburbs like Berkshire. I wonder how you reconcile that with your argument that place is the predominant factor.

Professor Elliot Major: That is a good question. I think it comes back to what Matthew has been saying. I obviously think the home environment is a key factor in this as well. David, you will know from your past work that parental expectations and aspirations with regards to the current education system are key. I suspect that if you look at that data, it will come back down to whether the parents see education as a way of success for their children.

Q29 **David Simmonds:** Local authorities, famously, are leaders of place. I guess—I reflect on my experience as a governor of the second school to become an academy—that a lot of the success strategy that was driven by the leader of that school was based on excluding as many of the local White working-class children as possible and bringing in middle-class children, so the institution improved but the life chances of the children in the locality did not get better. It leads on to the question: who is in the best position to provide that leadership of place, in order to make sure that it is not the institutional interest that is prioritised but the interest of the children in that community?

Professor Goodwin: Perhaps one answer to your question is to think about how we could provide mentoring for these children outside the school environment from people who do not have, as you say, an active interest or an incentive for what you might call playing the numbers on behalf of institutions. For example—not to return to anecdote—in my experience it was the scout leader and local civil society leaders. We can perhaps explore ways of formalising some of that mentoring so that it takes place outside the school environment—after school, for example, and wrapped up with extracurricular support. That seems absolutely essential to me.

Q30 **Chair:** Does anyone else want to comment on that?

Professor Elliot Major: My view is that we need better regional efforts that combine local authorities. I think that is the way we should go, rather than just having national policies. I have one other comment. One of the ironies of all this is that all three of us witnesses would be perceived as White working-class in some way, but we have all used the system to progress and become non-working-class. That is one of the difficult things in this. A lot of people say there aren't enough White working-class role models. It is just an interesting observation in the discussion that we are having.

Chair: Thank you. Clearly you are wonderful role models, all three of you.

Q31   **Kim Johnson:** Poverty and disadvantage have increased over the past 10 years due to austerity. Education providers and communities have seen a widening education attainment gap and an increase in free school meals. White British pupils are a large group found in all parts of the country. What challenges are there in pinpointing the causes of underachievement?

Professor Goodwin: I think you are absolutely right. They make up around two thirds of children on free school meals. The real challenge is that we have a number of taboos. We have social norms that are working against our getting into some of these trickier debates—for example, about the role of family and status deficit. I will give you one example that came up in some focus group work that I was doing. One contrast that a White working-class middle-aged father mentioned was the media coverage given to the grime artist Stormzy for providing scholarships for Black students to go to the University of Cambridge, whereas a parallel case of a retired academic providing scholarships for disadvantaged White British children to go to an independent school was rejected. In a sense, that taps into what I have been referring to: we have a taboo within this conversation. Obviously this Committee is outside of that, because it is dealing with the questions head-on, but in the wider national conversation we have a taboo. We still feel hesitant about getting this issue out into the open and saying, "This is a real problem. It's as much of a problem, if not more of a problem, than some of the other things that we are talking about." We do not need to racialise it or to descend down the rabbit warren of competing groups, but we do need to get it out into the open. For me, the biggest barrier are these social norms, which, for political reasons, are pushing us away from empirical fact in terms of what is happening in our societies.

Q32   **Chair:** Lee, you have been incredibly active in campaigning for the catch-up fund. How do you think it should be best used to alleviate this problem, with the national tutoring programme, the rest of the money and so on?

Professor Elliot Major: There is a lot weighing on the national tutoring programme; I feel for people leading it, because they can only do so much in the time we have. One of the key issues is getting those tutors to help children in the places that need them the most. That is one of the dilemmas for the national tutoring programme. We have good tutoring programmes in the big cities, but it is about how you get around the rest of the country.

We also have to look at the classroom context. I am doing a session with teachers today, interestingly enough, about how you engage with pupils in the classroom who are disengaged. Again, that comes back to a lot of the White working-class communities. The national tutoring programme will be a great help, but let us not lose sight of the issues of classroom divides as well.

Q33   **Apsana Begum:** I will make my questions short and quick. I want to understand your opinions of the impact that the coronavirus pandemic

has had, if any, on White disadvantaged pupils. What can be done to mitigate against that impact? Will your answers concentrate on areas such as funding and early years support? Some of you have mentioned the family socialisation process. How much do you think that the state should intervene in parental engagement? How much of it should be about youth and community work in particular? Some of the submissions we received called for a long-term strategy to look at not just the symptoms but the causes, which I think is why the Chair has been coming back with, "What are the reasons?" What are the underlying reasons for the disparities? That would be helpful to know.

Professor Goodwin: There were a lot of questions there. Will you repeat the first part of the question?

Apsana Begum: To understand what impact of the pandemic there might be on White disadvantaged pupils.

Professor Goodwin: On that specific point about covid, obviously the big concern is that if much of the factors that are shaping educational outcomes for these children take place outside the school and the current crisis is magnifying that environment as children have been less likely to be within the institutions, a plausible hypothesis is that this crisis will have some pretty disastrous effects for those children being pushed outside the only support mechanisms that they have had outside family and local community. I have seen no convincing, conclusive research yet—I think it is still too early in the process—but I am sure that Lee and others are doing it. To me, I think it will magnify a lot of what we are talking about, which are these non-institutional factors.

Professor Reay: The Education Endowment Foundation report shows that the median percentage by which the attainment gap was going to fall was 36%, so there will be an enormous impact from covid. The catch-up fund will obviously attempt to alleviate some of that, but I think it will only just touch the surface of what we really need to do.

Chair: Apsana, you wanted to come back.

Q34 **Apsana Begum:** I just wanted to say that a lot of the submissions we received suggested adjustments to the pupil premium and the introduction of regional weighting. Would that go some way to turn around areas where there is multi-generational decline? Would, for example, raising the early years pupil premium to match the primary school age pupil premium make a difference? Are those the sorts of policy interventions that should be made by the Government?

Chair: Just to add to what Apsana is saying, should we have family hubs—we talk about Sure Start-plus—in certain communities?

Professor Elliot Major: Our research is at an early stage, but we are finding that about 25% of young people had zero or less than one hour's help during lockdown, and actually the educational inequalities are still happening now post-lockdown, so we are going to face profound inequalities. I think the Government should be more interventionist in this area. Yes, more funding. The problem with pupil premium funding at the

moment, from what I am gathering, is that schools are just using it for general issues, so we really need to look at that. I would love the Committee to look into schools as social welfare hubs. That is a big debate that we have to have in this country. At the moment, by default, schools are acting as centres of social welfare. Whether they are resourced properly to do that is a big question that we need to answer. At the moment, that is what is happening on the ground.

Chair: Thank you, Apsana. Thank you again, everyone. As I said, we will draw on your evidence throughout our inquiry. We are running late, but we will have a three-minute recess until the next session.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation, Mary Curnock Cook OBE, and Dr Baars, Director of Research and Operations, Centre for Education and Youth.

Q35 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you for coming. Some of you are regulars to our Committee, but for the benefit of the tape, please would you give your name and title, starting with Becky?

Professor Francis: I am Professor Becky Francis, and I am chief executive of the Education Endowment Foundation.

Mary Curnock Cook: Good morning. I am Mary Curnock Cook, former chief exec of UCAS but now a serial and full-time non-exec director with organisations like the Access Project, the Dyson Institute, the Open University and multi-academy trust United Learning.

Chair: Thank you. I should add that you were the first person who wrote to me about this issue when I was elected Chair in 2017, so thank you for coming.

Dr Baars: Good morning, everyone. I am Dr Sam Baars. I am director of research at the Centre for Education and Youth.

Q36 **Chair:** Thank you. We aim to finish this session by, at the latest, ten past 12, so can we be as concise as possible? I do not know whether any of you were listening to the previous session, but there was a theme throughout. Before we can work out the solutions, we need to understand why this is happening—why there is lack of attainment with White working-class boys and girls compared with many other educational cohorts. I did feel, towards the end, that we made some progress, but I also felt that the questions were not being answered, in a way, because people were describing the whole problem rather than the specific issue. Could we start with you, Becky?

Professor Francis: Sure. I have something to say about the general state and the specifics, perhaps. In terms of the general state, I guess a key point is about persistent disadvantage and where those pupils are located, and of course, then, what ethnic background they have. Persistent

disadvantage does seem to be more responsible for attainment gaps than regional disparities, or even school quality or ethnicity. Steve Gorard's and Siddiqui's work has been very good on this, and suggests that patterns of disadvantage can explain much of the achievement disparity across both region and ethnicity. So it is about where pupils are concentrated and the long-term situation of disadvantage, which of course plays into those longer-term economic disparities that may feature across regions as well. So that point about intersectionality and about long-term disadvantage is really key.

Then, in terms of where you have been pressing about features of ethnicity and social class, in terms of gender there are a couple of key explanations here for the fact that White working-class and Black Caribbean working-class girls do better than their male conuterparts, who are the two groups of key most underachieving pupils. But we must also be aware that those girls are also underachieving more affluent boys. That is really important to hold on to. But the key explanations, I would say, are some issues around cultural constructions of masculinity. I can say more about that, if that is helpful. The other, related to that, is things like early reading and literacy that are then foundational for future educational success. Here we know that, particularly for White working-class boys, you can see those gaps emerging at an early stage. So if you are talking about one place to focus on, as well as economic disparities, that early reading and literacy is a key point.

Q37   **Chair:** If you could just very briefly tease out what cultural construction means—or did you say cultural reconstruction? I couldn't quite get that. Also could you just explain why literacy is an issue in White working-class communities but not necessarily other ethnic groups? If you can do it in a nutshell it would be appreciated.

Professor Francis: Focusing on the first bit, this has been my prior academic expertise, on gender construction. Girls really seem to have picked up the message in the last couple of decades that actually educational attainment is connected to their career focus, and have got quite invested in that, whereas for boys, without generalising too much, there is often a construction of masculinity which is about rebellion, having a laugh and so forth, that doesn't fit very tightly with a school's focus on diligence and so forth. That may be compounded if young people are not able to see the relevance of their schoolwork in terms of their local economic environment. So there is something there about educational engagement, in keeping with constructions of masculinity in local areas.

Q38   **Chair:** Thank you. And the literacy?

Professor Francis: The literacy point again comes back to constructions of masculinity. There has been a lot of work on this. Many boys see reading as a bit of a girly activity. It is in schools that manage to persuade all students of the benefits of reading and where reading is not a gendered activity—it is understood as equally appropriate for girls and boys—that you see those attainment gaps narrow.

Chair: Mary and Sam, would you comment before I bring in my colleagues?

Mary Curnock Cook: I am probably the least expert of all your witnesses, but when I was at UCAS I had all that wonderful data and I observed the end of the educational funnel, which narrowed so much more for some groups than others. I was always really concerned about the White ethnic group showing the lowest progression rates to university, particularly White students from poorer backgrounds, and even more particularly poor White boys. We talked in the earlier session about White privilege, and I think what the Committee is trying to do—controversially and courageously, I would say—is to establish whether there is some kind of systemic underprivilege for White children from poorer backgrounds. My reading of the situation is that there is, but it is not generally a consequence of whiteness and it does not bear comparison with underprivilege or barriers that people of colour from similar backgrounds still, sadly, have to navigate.

The data for White pupils from poorer backgrounds show that they make worse progress and they have worse outcomes and this really matters because White pupils are, of course, the ethnic majority in this country. That means that there are very, very many children in this group who are underserved by the system.

I should start by saying that the White ethnic majority in this country is a very big majority—I think it is about 87% of the population—which means that the inequalities are very amplified.

I was really struck by looking at maps of ethnicity in the UK. I really recommend SchoolDash, which has fantastic maps that you can look at for different characteristics. Huge swathes of the country are massively, predominantly White. Ethnic minorities, on the other hand, are kind of predominantly clustered in very clearly identifiable regions, such as London and the west midlands and, of course, they are much less represented in rural and coastal areas. Huge areas in the north-east or the south-west, for example, are characterised by higher levels of poverty, lower population density and are proportionately more White. By contrast, high ethnic diversity is often in or close to big cities and larger populations, where poverty is often living close next door to relative wealth.

I think it would be easier to think that deprivation and poverty is the issue rather than the whiteness of pupils, but I saw also that there is evidence of lower funding, more poorly performing schools, higher teacher vacancies, longer travel times, worse digital infrastructure, fewer role models, higher unemployment and, of course, worse educational outcomes in the areas of the country that are predominantly White. I think that is evidence that, in effect, amounts to a structural disadvantage for large numbers of White pupils in those areas.

Q39 **Chair:** That is an incredibly important point, which we will take note of. Sam?

Dr Baars: The very first point that I would want to really emphasise is that, in all of this, I don't see whiteness as a marker of disadvantage. Also, I think, while there is fairly compelling evidence at certain stages in the education system—we have focused quite a lot today on what happens when kids get to 16—and you can see in the data that there is a case for looking at the group of pupils we are talking about today, it is important to recognise that at other stages in the education system, it is actually less compelling.

At A-level, some of these gaps are actually flipped on their heads and some of the gaps that we see in admissions to higher education are not then represented in terms of the outcomes that students get at the end of higher education and later in the labour market. I know it is something that we all know, but it is really important to emphasise that point.

Robert, you posed the question: why do we see these gaps? Why this group? What might be going on here? If I had to pick one explanation, I would probably pick up the baton from what Mary was saying about an area-based focus. My own research and other research has shown that there are some really interesting, really stark area-based inequalities in a lot of this stuff—school quality, educational outcomes and aspirations as well.

I have never been a champion of the discourse about low aspirations. I do not think that is a very helpful discourse and public discourse around low aspirations needs to catch up with the research base.

That does not mean there are not differences in the types of aspirations that young people have. Some of the more interesting research in this area shows that kids growing up in inner-urban areas of deprivation can be up to five times as likely to aspire to highly skilled jobs as kids growing up in equally deprived outer-urban areas. That is controlling for ethnicity.

Something is going on there—it is not whiteness itself that is disadvantaging young people, but it might be the types of area in which we tend to find more White kids growing up. That then leads to explanations for me about the idea of opportunity structures, which we have been talking about already, which is great to hear. I would be keen to talk about them more if we have time.

Chair: That does not explain why White and other ethnic groups may be growing up in the same area but the attainment levels are better for those other ethnic groups. My colleague, David Johnston, made the point in the previous session. David, why don't you repeat that point about Berkshire?

Q40   **David Johnston:** I was saying that one of the places where poor White children do worst is in leafy suburbs, like Berkshire. I asked why that might be if place is so important to this.

Dr Baars: David, I would not disagree with you. It was that point you made about places like Berkshire, or that the Social Mobility Commission recently identified like Chiltern, for instance, as an area that is not

necessarily hugely deprived, but where social mobility seems to be quite poor, that makes the case for looking at some of these areas that are not inner-urban. They are often still deprived areas, but notions of deprivation do not actually capture what is really going on.

Robert, on your point, even if you look at areas where there is a predominantly White population, other ethnic groups still do better than local White kids.

Q41 **Chair:** What is the answer? What is the reason for that?

Dr Baars: I don't think I am best placed to answer that.

Chair: This is the whole kernel of what we are trying to find out for this inquiry. Ian, I will bring you in and then Mary, first, to answer that.

Q42 **Ian Mearns:** Regarding the geographical differences, there are parts of the country where there are pockets of prosperity and other parts where there are pockets of poverty. The comparisons are very, very stark in terms of overall levels of educational outcomes for youngsters who are from very similar social economic backgrounds from the same ethnic group.

Mary Curnock Cook: I was just going to pick up the leafy suburb point. The biggest impact on the statistics around all this still comes from big areas of population—so obviously London first of all, with huge ethnic diversity. We all know the story of London, and education has a huge impact on the overall picture. I am not saying that smaller communities do not have individual problems, but I think the problem in aggregate is still around those big differences in geography.

I also want to bring in why I think it is really important to consider the underachievement of boys. If we are looking at the gaps between boys and girls, we can largely ignore the rich/poor gap, or the north/south gap or the White/non-White gap, because boys and girls are pretty much equally distributed. They come from the same families and the same communities. They go to the same schools and are taught by the same teachers, and yet somehow their educational progress is quite different— so different that nearly 40,000 boys are missing from our universities by the time they get there. That is because fewer boys progress to A-levels and they do worse at key stage 4, 3 and 2 and so on. Boys on free school meals do worse than girls on free school meals, as we know.

I want to make the point that if we sorted out the issue with boys' education, we would go some way to sorting out a whole range of achievement and progress gaps, including the ones that look so stark for White pupils.

Chair: Can the other witnesses hold their thoughts for a minute? I want to bring in Caroline Johnson and then Jonathan Gullis.

Q43 **Dr Johnson:** I want to ask Mary a question relating to something that Becky said about university admissions. Becky, you said that we have noticed over the last two decades quite a significant increase in girls, and

that girls have realised the benefits of education in terms of social mobility.

A previous witness, Matthew, talked about the status issue among certain groups in society. I wonder whether our focus on girls over the last 20 years—This Girl Can; girls can do as well as boys and suchlike; and girls can take part in STEM—has led to that increase in girls improving in school, and that the focus now on Black and minority ethnic groups might now be having an effect on the White working class, who do not share the same status and are not eligible for the same extra funding or extra scholarships.

Professor Francis: Those points are really welcome. It is important not to overstate the attainment of White working class girls. There is a gap between White working-class girls and White working-class boys, but a much bigger gap still between more affluent boys and White working-class girls. We shouldn't overstate this.

Nevertheless, as I said, there is some evidence from my own past research that girls have been more invested in those educational narratives of future career and so forth, and that that might be productive for them. Also, as I say, in terms of their constructions of girlhood, of femininity, more girls bought into some of the things that will help them through their school journeys: reading, literacy, compliance in the classroom and diligence and so forth. Again, it is really important that I do not overstate these different points. These are generalisations. Nevertheless, there are some cultural elements here that can help to explain some of the disparities.

Q44   **Dr Johnson:** I guess the question is whether we invest particularly in trying to progress one group. If only a certain number of places are available at university, and we increase the number of girls, then we have to increase the number of boys, or increase the number of places. The same would be true if we want to increase the number of people from ethnic minority groups going to university. We either have to increase the number of places or reduce the number of White people who go to university. So the question is: does our focus on trying to engineer, improve or change the demographics at one particular level of education have a knock-on impact on the attainment of others?

Professor Francis: There is a good question about relationality versus absolute numbers that is important, but I think that equity and equitable starting points as well as outcomes are also important. Focusing on early starting points to level the playing field is key, whether that is addressing the long-term poverty issues that we have already talked about or whether in schools, which is what my organisation is focused on, we think about the best early interventions and the issues about teaching quality. I am sure we will come on to those, but they are shown to make the biggest impacts on kids' progress within schools.

As your discussion has already suggested, those opportunities are unfortunately unequally distributed through our system, but there might

be particular issues—in this case around gender and constructions of masculinity and femininity—that also intersect with those.

Dr Baars: I want to briefly come back on my earlier point about area-based disparities and the types of aspirations that young people have. My point was that some of that analysis controls for ethnicity, so whether you are White British or not, growing up in an area that is outer urban appears to have an impact on the types of aspirations that you have. There seems to be a depressing effect on aspirations, if you like, regardless of the ethnic background of the kids you are talking about. That is important to clarify.

These sorts of debates prompt us to interrogate the capacity of the system to accommodate everyone. On an academic note, as Becky said, it is really a question of whether we are interested in absolute or relative social mobility. Relative social mobility encourages us to say, "There might be more people from this background or gender entering these areas of the labour market or achieving this well at school, but has the acceleration of their capacity to get to those places been greater or less than the acceleration of other groups at the same time?" That question of relativity is arguably more meaningful.

One of the other brute facts about social mobility is that there is only limited space for people, so some people will have to lose out, so to speak. That is probably just a feature of history that we are going to have to get used to.

Q45   **Fleur Anderson:** I would like to ask about the relative weight of when differences should be made in the education system—early years, primary school, secondary school. You all touched on different areas. Mary, you gave a very helpful list of the issues that we should be looking at. A lot of that was secondary school, but we have also talked about early years and the differences in gender and literacy in primary school.

This is probably to all three of you. When is the most effective change that can be made to stop this difference? Is it early years, primary school or secondary school? What should we be looking at mainly?

Chair: That is a very good question.

Mary Curnock Cook: Thank you, Fleur. Early years is absolutely at the top of my list. Those gaps start in early years, and it is really hard for children to catch up if they can't read, so early literacy is incredibly important—particularly for boys who, as Becky said, tend to be less successful with literacy early on. That carries on through education and shows up in the university statistics. It is absolutely early years every time.

Going back to Caroline's earlier question, just to remind you that at the moment there are not any caps on university recruitment, so we are not in the situation where if you recruit one extra White person you have to not recruit somebody from an ethnic minority. I also want to pick up your really good point about role models, who have an effect. We have all

watched how female role models have made a difference to young women in all sorts of areas—although perhaps not enough, in terms of women in science.

I have to say that I continue to worry about the predominantly female workforce in schools. In primary schools, I think 85% of teachers are female, and in secondary it is 65% to 70%. Lots of people have told me that that doesn't make a difference, but I instinctively feel that boys need some male role models as much as girls need female role models.

Professor Francis: I am one of the people who has had this discussion with Mary in the past, because my own research showed that there is not a relationship between teacher gender and boys' educational attainment. Actually, what kids care most about is having subject-expert teachers, and teachers who care about them and their success, which I guess is what we would expect. As I say, there doesn't seem to be a correlation between teacher gender and kids' outcomes.

Nevertheless, that broader social representation is, of course, very important. As I have said, wider social changes can explain some of these shifts, particularly around girls' attainment. It is important to say that the change to a national curriculum shifted girls' attainment most quickly, as they were forced to do science and maths subjects, and then they started doing better at them at GCSE. Of course, these wider messages are important, too.

Q46   **Jonathan Gullis:** I agree with what Mary said earlier about this being an important topic that probably does not fit into the PC culture that we are meant to live under. A big thanks to you, Chair, for being bold enough to allow the Committee to undertake this important investigation. I spent eight years on the frontline as a schoolteacher; I remember that when we looked through empirical data, the one thing we did not ever talk about was White working class or White free school meals. We looked at every other group. That was always something that therefore led to a blindspot in the education system.

When it comes to the "White working class" definition, we are talking about White British pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Does the panel think that the free school meals element is the best indicator for disadvantage? What does "working class" mean in 2020, seeing as there has been much debate around what that definition stands for?

Dr Baars: In terms of early years, I completely agree. To skip back a second, I think adult education is crucial and in some ways that is almost pre-early years: the self-advocacy that parents feel about their ability to learn as adults has an infectious consequence for kids. On the gender of teachers, I do not think there is much weight either that that has an impact on boys in primary schools. However, something I have noticed when I go into read with kids at my daughter's primary school is that you do not see that many dads volunteering at some schools. That might be an interesting aspect of the gender equation.

In terms of definitions of "working class" in the 21st century, that is a great question. Lots of books written on that one. The previous panel suggested that looking at income could be potentially a more useful indicator of disadvantage than free school meals. My sense is that the available data suggests that is not the case. There is a real cliff-edge in terms of FSM eligibility and how pupils do at school that is not really present if you look at a more gradated scale of income. It is surprisingly flat in terms of how kids do from families with different levels of income. There is a gradient, but it is relatively flat.

Free school meals as a policy tool to divert resources and attention is still useful, but academic research has shown that you can wrap free school meals in with wider measures of socioeconomic status. Steve Strand is just one academic who has done that to show that some of the things we are talking about—differences in groups—are present when you look at free school meals versus non-free school meals, but they also, in some ways, get even stronger if you look at wider measures of socioeconomic status, which comes down to parental education and the jobs that parents do. I think we go wrong when we see free school meals as a marker of class. I think there is a real mismatch between the two. There is some overlap at the edges, but really they are quite distinct things.

Free school meals is a really useful policy tool, but if we want to start looking at the mechanisms and some of the explanations that might be class-based, then we should talk about class and all the things that class means. The one aspect of class I would say is history, the historical element to class. That is something that is carried in and through families. We often focus on kids' current position or what jobs parents currently do, but we forget about the fact that, for most people, class implies some sense of history and that is why it continues to have a lasting effect even though we are now in a new century.

Chair: Would anyone else like to comment on Jonathan's question?

Professor Francis: It is important to reiterate—I am sure you have had this already—that for all ethnic groups there is a gap for free school meals, and that Black Caribbean-heritage boys underachieve as much as White working-class boys. As Sam said earlier, this is not necessarily about Whiteness, keeping in mind the various issues that I have brought up already about region and then long-term disadvantage and so forth. That is also important in terms of the wider social class question. Those different categories are important for answering different questions and looking in different ways. Again as Sam said, the categories 'free school meals' and particularly the wider group that are ever-FSM give us useful handles in the school system and, of course, accessible handles. That also makes a difference. However, it does not necessarily speak to that wider picture, either in terms of culture or in terms of disadvantage. The Great British Class Survey suggested that once you put what we might call the traditional working class together with the emergent service sector, and then with the precariat as well, we are basically talking about half the population, so that is a much bigger group.

Chair: Before you come in, Mary, I just wanted to ask if Jonathan wants to come back, and then Mary can answer both.

Q47 **Jonathan Gullis:** Thank you very much. I just wanted to quickly say that I completely agree: obviously, disadvantage is disadvantage, and sadly all ethnic groups that are disadvantaged are falling behind, but I do think there has been a culture for a long period of time where White working-class disadvantage has somehow been unfashionable to mention, or deemed to not be much of an issue. About the early years, especially, I would also like to hear what the panel think about why poorer White British households are not taking up their full entitlement of funded pre-school hours. Is that simply a mistrust of the education system that they may have experienced at first hand during the 1970s and 1980s, which as we know went through a rocky period in terms of outcomes in some areas?

Mary Curnock Cook: On the free school meal data point, I think there is quite a large number of people who are eligible for free school meals who do not claim them. I have not actually seen the figure on that, but it is worth bearing that in mind when using FSM as the proxy for disadvantage. Why do families not take up what is available to them? Becky and Sam will have much better answers than me, but my observation would be that families whose lives are precarious and impoverished can be very chaotic, and that can make it difficult for families to support their children to take up regular slots in early-years provision.

Q48 **Kim Johnson:** I wanted to pick up on the point that Jonathan has just made. Does the panel believe that it was PC to discuss deeply entrenched institutional racism that excludes young Black boys, who end up with no education?

Professor Francis: I am not quite sure about the PC point. As I have said, this issue of persistent disadvantage is the one I would want to reiterate. My own organisation, as I say, is very much focused on what can be done in schools, and hopefully we will get on to that in a minute.

In terms of actual ethnic background and so forth, being clear and mindful about these issues is really important. You are absolutely right, Kim: the issue that I think you are getting to, about the differential rates for Black boys—particularly Black Caribbean heritage boys—in school exclusions, is something we should be very attuned to. Again, some of my work has been involved with pupil grouping, setting and streaming, and I am very interested in the concentration of both White disadvantaged kids and Black disadvantaged kids in low sets and streams, and the issues around poorer quality provision and so forth that can sometimes result from that. It is important to keep both these dominant trends and these intersectionality points in mind.

Q49 **Chair:** Just to be clear—I said this in the last session—this is one aspect of our left behind inquiry, and we are going to be looking at all left-behind cohorts over the coming year, as well as place. Sam, do you have a brief comment to make?

Dr Baars: I was going to make precisely that point. I do not think it is politically correct to look at some of the disadvantages that other, non-White groups face too, which presumably is precisely why the Committee is looking at the attainment of those groups.

Q50 **Tom Hunt:** I agree with Jonathan: from some of the written evidence we have received, it would seem that there is a problem, and that certain organisations do not think we should be looking at this. I think that is something that needs to be addressed going forward. On the specific issue that we are looking at, which is the educational attainment of White pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly at GCSE level, the reality is that whether you want to go to university, into technical education or straight into work, a reasonably good grade in English and maths is very important, and at the moment a low proportion of pupils are getting that. We hear in a previous session that many of these families and pupils do not see higher education as a vehicle for progress. To what extent do you think that the drive for 50% of all young people to go to university—this very academic focus—has been a part-contributor towards lower educational attainment at, say, GCSE level, because there isn't necessarily that thing to work towards, as there has been insufficient provision of good-quality technical education and apprenticeships?

Chair: I am going to give that question to Mary, because she is an expert on this.

Mary Curnock Cook: Thank you, Tom. This is a really interesting question. Unfortunately, what I have seen in the system is that children who perform less well at school get shunted into so-called technical and vocational routes. I really welcome the recent announcements about funding for further education colleges and the emphasis on high-quality technical and vocational education, but unless we give children across the board good achievement levels, so that they can then make a conscious choice between an academic route in university and technical and vocational education in university or college, we will always end up shunting the ones who have done less well into what is seen as a second-class route. I think, leaving aside the destinations that people go on to, we must address the inequality in attainment through primary and secondary education, so that people can have a real choice about which route they take. It should not just be that the clever ones go to university and everyone else gets shunted off to FE, because then we'll end up with more of a social divide in all this. So I still think the key issue is about getting equality—better equality of education outcomes in primary and secondary education.

Q51 **David Johnston:** I have a couple of questions, although the first is different from the one I was originally intending to ask. In the 1990s, Dr Tony Sewell did a lot on why Black Caribbean boys were being excluded so much from school, and found it had a lot to do with teacher attitudes and teacher expectations of that particular group. So my first question is: to what extent do you think that teacher expectations are a factor—not the only factor, but a factor—in some places when it comes to White working-class children? That is the first question, and the

My second question is particularly to Becky and Sam, because you have been researching this for a number of years. Has anything changed since the Education Committee's Report in 2014? Some things may have got worse, but the Committee then did a report on this. Have things got better, worse, or just stayed the same?

Chair: I have our predecessor Committee Report here, in fact. Could Becky start, please, and then we'll go on to Sam, and could you answer both questions?

Professor Francis: Thanks, David. You want brief responses on both, I guess. In terms of Tony Sewell's work and teacher expectations, I think they do have a role to play. My own research focused on the British Chinese, and we quite clearly showed that teachers tended to have high expectations of British Chinese kids—sometimes even problematically so in the experience of the kids on the receiving end, who felt under a lot of pressure to perform, especially in particular subject areas. I think that those long-term stereotypes and unconscious biases that, as we know, we are all subject to can play out in terms of how kids are perceived, as Tony was arguing.

In terms of what has changed since the previous Committee, which I also gave oral evidence to, certainly in terms of the attainment gap, very little change overall, although it is quite hard to trace, because of course there have been changes in Attainment 8 assessment and so forth, which means that tracing over time can be quite challenging, but certainly for the particular group that you are focused on, there does not seem to be evidence, really, of a closing of the gap. Again, I draw your attention to the issue about ever-FSM kids compared with those persistently taking free school meals. The Education Policy Institute suggests that one reason we have seen a tailing off of the gradual narrowing of the gap that we were beginning to see over the last decade is because of the failure to address attainment for the most persistently disadvantaged, many of whom will of course be White working class, so there is a relationship there.

Q52   Chair: Sam?

Dr Baars: Good questions. I think teacher expectations are a factor. We did some work with the Greater London Authority a couple of years ago, looking at White free school meals and all Black Caribbean boys in the capital, and we found evidence that teacher expectations can be a negative influence on the outcomes of both of those groups of boys.

In terms of change, something that alarms me—it is easier to be alarmist than to be positive, I know—is that there has been progress, but it has been way too slow. People can therefore point to progress and say that we are making progress, which is always good, but if it is way too slow—the Sutton Trust showed that, at this rate, the attainment gap will be closed in around a century's time, which is probably a little longer than we would want to wait. Recent Institute for Fiscal Studies research showed that the link between school funding and deprivation scores is beginning to be

decoupled slightly by new funding settlements. That is potentially an issue for the future. As with responding to covid, there is latency in the system. If we start making changes to the funding system that disadvantage schools that need funding most, in 10 years' time we are more likely, rather than less likely, to be back here discussing this again.

Q53   **Chair:** Thank you. Mary, briefly, if you can.

Mary Curnock Cook: Briefly on this interesting point about teacher expectations, a very interesting new dataset is available to us this year: the centre assessment grades. That will offer some really interesting insight into whether teachers have some kind of unconscious—or, God forbid, conscious—bias.

One other very brief point is that I was really alarmed when reading some of the evidence presented to your Committee about special educational needs. I had always seen in the data that a lot of children who were not doing well had special educational needs, and lots more were boys, especially earlier on. However, I saw that evidence that sometimes special educational needs is seen as an outcome, rather than requiring support. In other words, some teachers with an unruly boy or somebody underachieving kind of puts them in a special educational needs or a statement box, which takes them off the track forever. I do not know if anyone knows more about that than me.

Chair: That is a great segue, because that is exactly the area that Fleur wanted to ask you about.

Q54   **Fleur Anderson:** You have absolutely anticipated the next question I was going to ask. I have a couple of related questions. First, to Sam in particular, is there a relationship between the decline of youth services and those support services outside but alongside the school? For all of you, is there something more that we should be looking into here about special educational needs support and outcomes, and do they make a difference particularly for this group? Is there a differential for this group with SEN?

Dr Baars: If I had to identify one area of the wider support that supports young people's attainment at school, and actually, far more importantly than that, their broader wellbeing and functioning as human beings, it is the decline of child and adolescent mental health services, and the strain that they face at the moment. That is precisely the kind of wider systemic factor that then places more strain on schools. That is really important, potentially even more so than youth services.

On SEND, it was really good that the previous panel flagged this idea of the forgotten third—the roughly third of pupils who finish secondary school without a decent pass in English and maths. Around 70% of young people with SEND are in that group, as opposed to about 29% of pupils without SEND, so there is clearly something going on in the system that means that we are not serving young people who have special educational needs or disabilities sufficiently.

Q55   **Chair:** Thank you. Becky, can you give a summary answer, if possible?

Professor Francis: Other people are better placed than me to talk about that.

Chair: Mary?

Mary Curnock Cook: No, just that I was shocked to see that special educational needs and statements are potentially used by teachers as a solution to children who are doing badly and as a box to put them in, rather than being used to help them to do better. I thought that was troubling.

Q56   **Tom Hunt:** I think it has been touched upon already, but I do not think it will do any harm to ask the question. White British pupils who are eligible for free school meals are a large group, found in all parts of the country. What challenges do you perceive in pinpointing the exact causes of the underachievement?

Professor Francis: That is a big question. Of course, we have school-level evidence. The gaps seem to permeate throughout schools, whatever the quality of the school, but we know that in schools that are performing more highly, disadvantaged kids are often outperforming even more affluent kids in schools that are lower-performing. That issue about school quality, and particularly teacher and teaching quality, is important. It is an important point to make, so I will make it, if that is okay.

Coming back to the issues about region and where working-class kids, particularly White working-class kids, are focused demographically, we know that there are issues about school teacher supply and retention, particularly around supply of subject expert teachers in those areas. The work of Luke Sibieta, Becky Allen and others has made that very plain. The Government focus on supporting retention through the early careers framework and increasing teacher quality is important; and remarks have already been made about the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Q57   **Chair:** Given the problems of teacher recruitment, especially in disadvantaged areas, is an answer to establish very localised teacher training colleges with financial incentives to encourage teachers to train in local colleges and teach in local schools, where there is deprivation?

Professor Francis: That is an interesting question. Teacher training is already locally provided, whether through a school-based route or a higher education route. It tends to be very local. Certainly, much more can be done to further incentivise teachers both to teach in deprived schools and to remain in them. There is good work going on through the early career framework, the new NPQs and so forth to try to do that, but we could be punching even harder, I think. It is one of the key issues.

We know that teacher quality makes the biggest difference to attainment, but also that it is particularly important for disadvantaged kids. It can really make a difference.

Q58   **Chair:** Would you favour teacher-degree apprenticeships?

Professor Francis: I am committed to teaching being a high-quality profession and I feel that its being a degree-level profession is important. The routes into that are wide open, and that is important too.

Chair: At the moment, we have postgraduate teacher degree apprenticeships. Would you favour teacher-degree apprenticeships?

Professor Francis: I am, as I say, very supportive of a postgraduate profession; I think that is fundamental. I want to see the teaching profession reflect our other great professions, including medicine and law. Facilitating access routes into the profession, so that we have the best teachers drawn from the widest workforce—

Chair: Do you favour teacher-degree apprenticeships or not?

Professor Francis: Broadly, no.

Q59   **Tom Hunt:** The issues around teacher recruitment and retention are critically important, but they are critically important to all pupils. Teacher recruitment and retention should impact all pupils, whether they are from a BAME background or a White working-class background. I am thinking out loud. A lot of the programmes like Teach First, when it comes to people who are new to the teaching profession, often from a very good academic background, are they often attracted to London and the big cities more than the more provincial towns? The provincial towns are slightly less ethnically diverse than the large cities and urban areas, so potentially there is an issue about trying to attract new top-rate teachers to less your London, less your Manchester. I know we have specific issues about teacher recruitment and retention in Ipswich, for example. We sometimes lose teachers to London because that is where young people want to be. I am just putting that out there as a potential strand of thought.

Professor Francis: I think you are exactly on the right track, Tom. That is what organisations like Teach First have been trying to do—to drive new teacher recruits into those areas that are less urban, less diverse and so forth, and therefore perhaps less attractive to young teachers, but to try to incentivise that work. That is exactly where I think we need to go even further, even faster.

Q60   **Ian Mearns:** Am I right in thinking, from your previous answers, that you favour a Finnish-style model where the vast majority of teachers are educated to a master's degree level themselves?

Professor Francis: I think further professionalising the teacher profession and supporting and valuing the teaching profession, however that is done, is fundamental here—rewarding and respecting them. We are all mindful of the work that has gone on over the pandemic and the Herculean task that teachers have been doing. Making sure that all young people have access to cutting-edge, high-quality and always developing teaching is what we want to see and will be a vital step in addressing the present patchiness in our education system.

Q61 **Ian Mearns:** Going back to Tom's question, is it not the situation that young people and children's life experience itself can have an impact on their aspirations? There are areas of the country where the economic prospects, the job types and experience of their older siblings, cousins or extended family—even neighbours—can be not particularly great from a jobs perspective. That in itself can have an impact on youngsters' thinking about what lies out there for them at the end of their statutory schooling. I am posing that as a question.

Chair: Mary, do you or Sam want to come back on that?

Mary Curnock Cook: Every map I looked at pointed to exactly those types of factors. There are areas of the country that are very predominantly White in terms of ethnic diversity, with exactly those problems. These are all things piling on top of each other.

Just to add to Tom's question about underachievement, I did not find a map of digital or broadband infrastructure mapped on to ethnicity and geography, but I think we all know that, for example, broadband availability in coastal and rural areas is much less good. Education has made huge steps forward using digital resources, not least during the pandemic. Having those extra tools available to help children who are falling behind is another important point.

Dr Baars: A key narrative that we need to move beyond to make progress in this area is this idea of needing to move out in order to move on. It is absolutely right that for so many young people, as they get older it is a chance to fly the nest and see other parts of the world. The research I have done on White working-class areas shows that young people are very locally rooted, with a strong attachment to families and place. I think we somewhat ride roughshod over that when we have a system and society in which you have to move out of certain areas to get on.

It is not an easy nut to crack, but there is a clear role for local authorities in creating thriving places where not only might young people consider sticking around because there is a range of opportunities, but where young teachers might also want to go and live.

For all that London has going for it, housing there is really expensive, and at the centre for education in Newcastle we have shown that that is a real problem. There is something going for lots of these areas. With an asset-based approach, I think this can be solved.

Q62 **Ian Mearns:** An observation is that one of the things that I keep saying that the north-east has never been short of exporting is people. Wherever you go, you will find people from the north-east of England—I mean anywhere you go. I have been in some far-flung corners of this planet and found people from the north-east of England there because of the work situation.

This question is really aimed at you, Becky—I know that we have been here before together, from this Committee's perspective. Your submission points to improving teaching quality as the strongest lever that schools

have for improving pupil outcomes. But schools cannot do it alone, can they?

Professor Francis: No, they cannot do it alone, Ian, and as you know there is a lot of academic debate about the scope and proportion of the explanation of the attainment gap in respect of the impact of schools.

In those estimates, the range is from anything from 20% to 50% of difference. To my mind, though, we have to focus on the art of the possible. Hence the focus of my organisation is on thinking about what we can do within schooling to equalise life chances and ensure that kids are able to expand their talents and have that equality of opportunity.

We have touched on some of those issues here about quality of teaching but also about things like early intervention and the importance of the early years, which is absolutely right. I would want to advocate for a stronger pupil premium within the early years. We have seen the beginnings of tilting towards primary, and that is absolutely right. I have also talked about the particular focus on early literacy—I would probably add numeracy—to give kids those future opportunities into the curriculum. Without literacy and numeracy, you are always going to be struggling to catch up.

Q63 **Ian Mearns:** I suppose the question to the whole panel would be: from what we have heard this morning about the deep-seated problems that exist in many White working-class communities but also in families, do you think that programmes of family-based learning might be helpful in resolving some of the problems long term?

Chair: That alludes to what Matthew Goodwin was saying earlier, Ian. That is a very important question.

Dr Baars: I would reiterate my earlier point about adult education being crucial in this. We know from research that parental self-efficacy—not just parental education level, but parents' belief that they can shape the world around them, including how their kids are getting on at school—is a really important factor. Adults continuing that belief that they can learn is really crucial. Actually, part of the solution is to focus on the adults, not the kids.

Chair: Becky first, then I will finish with Mary. I want to come back to Becky on something else before we finish.

Ian Mearns: You're in for it, Becky.

Professor Francis: Am I responding on this one? Just to say that parental engagement—particularly for parents who have not had positive experiences themselves at school, of course—is notoriously difficult for schools. We certainly can do better. It is one of those areas where even interventions from organisations like mine, when research programmes have focused on this, have traditionally struggled. But there is a lot more that we can do, by schools reaching out, drawing in and making relevant working-class parents' experience to the school. It is shown to be productive, but it is really hard to achieve.

Q64   **Chair:** Mary, before you answer, in 2010 there was a programme on the BBC with Gareth Malone, who came to a school in my constituency, where he was looking at some of the issues that we have been discussing. Something as simple as parents—particularly the father—reading to their children at night made a significant difference to the child's attainment in school. That is slightly related to the question that Ian asked. Have you looked at such initiatives and whether they make a difference across the board?

Mary Curnock Cook: I thought the evidence that was put to the Committee on parental engagement was really strong—making the distinction between parental engagement and parental involvement, which is not enough. We have said in both sessions this morning how important basic literacy and oracy are to enable children to succeed at school. If parents or family members don't have high levels of literacy themselves, they cannot do that reading to their kids in the evening or help them in that way. Even something as basic as helping with literacy for parents so that they can do that would be a big step forward.

Q65   **Chair:** Thank you. I am sorry, Becky, but I have two final questions for you. Given the problems of teacher recruitment and the fact that more mature people may be worried about taking on student loans for one reason or another—single parents may find it difficult—why are you against teaching-degree apprenticeships? If we have policing-degree apprenticeships and nursing-degree apprenticeships, what is wrong with teaching-degree apprenticeships?

Professor Francis: I will have to think further about this, Robert, and talk to you outside the Committee, but my gut reaction is that, where we can, we should be modelling on the great professions, because we need further professionalisation of teaching, not less.

Chair: The great professions are also nursing, policing and others, and if they can do it—

Professor Francis: They absolutely are. I am thinking about medicine. Actually, at present I don't think there is a problem, because my understanding is that we actually have a surplus of applications this year into initial teacher education—an abundance of riches. The question there, of course, is then whether you want to get more selective about entrance into teaching, as a way to ramp up quality, and there are other debates that we can have there, but that is probably for a separate inquiry.

Chair: Okay, thank you. I have one more question, but I'll get Caroline in first because I think it is on this point.

Q66   **Dr Johnson:** As a medical graduate, the difference between a medical degree and a teaching-degree apprenticeship is that medical degrees are perhaps one of the most on-the-job type of forms of training. You go in to see the patients, and you go on to the wards and into general practices. I don't see that as a bad thing at all, and I fail to understand why being at work as a teacher as part of a degree apprenticeship would preclude you from being an excellent teacher. I think it would make you a very good

teacher.

Professor Francis: That is absolutely right, Caroline. I think what we are talking about here is the postgraduate nature, rather than the hands-on nature, because as you know teacher training is already quite hands-on, which I absolutely support. This is very much about level and prestige, which rightly or wrongly is very bound up with wages, with respect in society and so forth, and those are all things I want to support for teaching. This is not about ruling out different routes, but it is about making teaching a high-status, appealing career, which is what other successful education systems in the world have managed to do. We know that that does drive quality.

Q67 **Chair:** I can't see why it would not be prestigious if you have a degree apprenticeship, because you are still at the university, where it is predominately learning. Mary, what is your view about whether there should be teaching degree apprenticeships?

Mary Curnock Cook: I think the real distinction is that a degree apprenticeship is an undergraduate degree. The point that Becky makes very clearly is that maybe it is a postgraduate degree apprenticeship. As far as I know, they pretty much do look like apprenticeships given that so much time is spent in practice—

Q68 **Chair:** So you are both saying that someone can only be a teacher if they have done a degree at university; only that is good enough. Is that your view?

Mary Curnock Cook: Well, currently you do your undergraduate degree in the subject that you want to teach.

Chair: I know, but what I am asking, very simply, is: do you believe that people are only good enough to be teachers if they have a traditional university degree, rather than a degree apprenticeship?

Professor Francis: At the moment, it is the best way we have to test that subject level specialism, which is clearly evidenced to be important to teacher quality delivery. As I have said, that is doubly important for disadvantaged kids. Research shows that teaching quality is the most important point.

Q69 **Chair:** So nurses and police who are doing degree apprenticeships do not have that quality?

Professor Francis: Honestly, I am not expert in either nursing or policing.

Chair: Okay. I just think the argument is an unusual one.

Q70 **Dr Johnson:** If I may come back on that, I can understand why, if you are teaching history or physics at A-level, there may be an advantage to having studied physics or history to degree level, but if you are teaching six or seven-year-olds basic literacy and maths skills, do you think it is really necessary to have both an undergraduate and a postgraduate degree qualification? Do you think that, by putting in such stringent

requirements, we are perhaps missing out on some very talented teachers who may be excellent at explaining these things to young people?

Chair: And people who are older, who may be too wary of taking on a loan.

Dr Johnson: What would your primary degree need to be to teach reading at age six?

Professor Francis: There are undergraduate degrees in primary education, and that is the common route.

Chair: In a very, very gentle way, because I have massive respect for you, I feel that this whole view of the problem of doing apprenticeships can be down to intellectual snobbery—not from you—that everyone has to have a full academic degree at university, and not have a partial experience at university and do a degree apprenticeship. I think we would make a big difference to White working-class boys and girls if we can get more teacher recruitment in disadvantaged areas. That would be quite a route, which is why I have gone on about it—not to give you a hard time.

Ian Mearns: It is not just about imparting facts. It is about the methodology of teaching effectively. It is not just about being an expert in history or geography, then passing on that knowledge to other people. It is also about how to interact with children and find the best ways—the methodology—to pass on the knowledge to them.

I think Becky should understand, Chair, that your two favourite words when put together are "degree apprenticeship".

Q71 **Chair:** You know me well. May I ask you a question you will like, Becky? It is genuinely the final question. Thanks to you and people like Lee Elliot Major, we got the catch-up premium from the Government. I am very pleased that you have an important role in it. Given the catch-up premium and the tutoring programme, what should we be doing to ensure that we help groups such as under-attaining, disadvantaged White working-class boys and girls?

Professor Francis: The Education Endowment Foundation has published a guide on effective uses of the catch-up premium and the £1 billion catch-up fund that has come online now. The national tuition programme is a key and exciting plank of that because it is strongly evidence-based. It also offers that bespoke support to compensate for learning loss over the period. So it is a really useful tool—although, of course, only one tool. We all realise that this cannot be a sticking-plaster; there needs to be sustained support for the differential loss in learning that young people have experienced, particularly disadvantaged young people, over the period of the pandemic.

We are also involved with the Nuffield early language intervention, which is another Government-sponsored programme that schools can access free. Again, it is focused on the early years and on language development, as we have just been talking about.

Some of those approaches are particularly productive in supporting the kids you are focused on in this inquiry. As you know from your previous inquiry, that support is doubly important in the pandemic. We think that an evidence-based approach to both the compensatory work and pupil premium spending across the piece is really important to ensure that the strongest and most promising approaches are delivered to the kids who need them most.

Q72 **Chair:** Mary, I saw you nodding. Do you want to add anything?

Mary Curnock Cook: I just wanted to say that it is really important that the national tutoring programme is extended to key stage 5—I think it only goes up to key stage 4 at the moment—and that we do not think that this is just a one-year problem. The deficits that people have experienced this year will not just go away and be caught up in one year.

Q73 **Chair:** I am guessing that the Government will take evidence from how the first year works before trying to expand it. I very much hope they do.

I thank all of you very much for coming today. Thank you, Sam, for all you have done, and thank you, Mary and Becky, for all your work to get us the catch-up premium; It was magnificent. Good wishes to all.