



Youth Unemployment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Youth unemployment

Thursday 24 June 2021

11.40 am

Watch the meeting

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

Evidence Session No. 17

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 170 - 176

Witnesses

I: Jennifer Coupland, Chief Executive, Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE); Tom Dower, Principal, UTC South Durham; Tony Ryan, Chief Executive, Design and Technology Association.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of Witnesses

Jennifer Coupland, Tom Dower and Tony Ryan.

Q170 The Chair: Welcome to this evidence session of the Youth Unemployment Committee. The meeting is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website. A transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary. Could I just say that Lord Baker of Dorking has recused himself from this session because of his interest in relation to university technical colleges?

Can I welcome Jennifer Coupland, Tom Dower and Tony Ryan to act as witnesses in this second session today? I am going to ask them all just to say a word or two about themselves.

Jennifer Coupland: Good morning, everyone. I am the chief executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and have been so since November 2019. The institute has a very specific role in working directly with employers to set standards for apprenticeship training and technical qualifications. Prior to joining the institute, I have worked in the apprenticeships space since about 2012, overseeing the introduction of the Richard reforms, putting employers in the driving seat of designing apprenticeships, and subsequently moving to working in DfE, where I led work on the new T-levels.

Tom Dower: I am the principal of UTC South Durham just north of Darlington. We opened in 2016, set up by the University of Sunderland and employers Hitachi Rail and Gestamp. We provide a balanced academic and technical education for 14 to 19 year-olds from across the north-east. I am a mechanical engineer by training, with a very theoretical degree from Cambridge University. That was then perfectly balanced by starting work in the chemical industry on Teesside and understanding the meaning of working life. I then worked in industry and management consultancy across a range of business sectors, before training to be a teacher in London and leading design and technology departments in south London and Northumberland.

Tony Ryan: Good morning. I have a fairly unique position, I think. I left school at 16, fairly unspectacularly. I became an apprentice motor vehicle mechanic. I found myself again through that apprenticeship. I then became a teacher of design and technology, worked my way through and became a secondary head teacher for almost 12 years. I am now chief executive of the Design and Technology Association, looking after 23,000 teachers nationally and internationally, and trying to join the subject up with business across the country.

The Chair: I want to ask you all a very general question, which is about government ambitions for technical education and training to be seen as a viable route for young people alongside academic education. What is preventing these routes being seen as equal?

Jennifer Coupland: Perceptions are really changing on that front. You may have seen a YouGov poll for the *Times* that was published in May

this year, which found that parents were pretty much evenly split on whether they would want their child to pursue an academic or a vocational route, with 37% favouring a degree and 36% an apprenticeship.

There are a few things that have contributed to this shift that we have seen over the last few years. One of them, importantly, has been the creation of the apprenticeship levy. One of the effects of the levy is that it has drawn many more household name employers into offering apprenticeships. When parents can see that you can use an apprenticeship as a route to working in organisations such as Google, IBM, Pfizer, BAE Systems, Nestlé or PwC, it becomes a much more aspirational route than it has been hitherto, so that has been really important.

At the institute, we have been working closely with thousands of employers to set really high standards for apprenticeship training. As these reforms have been rolled out, people are gaining much more confidence that, if they take an apprenticeship route, they are going to have a really great training programme that will give them a route into a valuable career.

Committees such as this also have a big role to play in changing perceptions. Moving the debate away from a perceived lack of parity of esteem and getting much more into the space of valuing technical education in its own right, as something completely different from academic education—it has a different purpose that is just as valuable—is where we need to be focusing our energies.

Tom Dower: I agree with almost everything you have said, Jennifer. The issue about academic and technical education being separate is something I would want to take issue with, perhaps, but I agree with the positive signs and certainly welcome the ambitious focus on technical education from the Government. It is so crucial to link business need and economic prosperity with education, and it was good to hear the positive messages about the Gatsby benchmarks and so on in the earlier session.

I would like to make two points. First, technical interest needs to start young. If we can break the back of that interest at an early stage, that becomes really important. Post 16 is not soon enough to motivate young people, which is why UTCs start their technical education typically at 13 or 14. We must engage with primary schools. We have an ambitious programme that you might want to hear more about at some point. School leaders and careers leaders need to see the impact of technical and careers-focused education on their students, and that will shift perceptions within schools.

The second point I would like to make is about the huge pressure that schools are under, particularly at the moment but perhaps always, from performance tables, Ofsted inspections and exams. Schools react to the pressure that they face. When I was a leader in Northumberland, I made embarrassingly few industry links, because all the pressure was on those exam results, so I do not blame schools at all for this. We have an amazing opportunity right now to look at exams, reconsider their purpose

and to work out a way of assessing young people and measuring school performance that encourages the balance between technical education and careers focus.

Tony Ryan: I agree that there is a sense of positivity around at the moment. There is an awful lot that is positive within the recently released White Paper, and it is very encouraging to hear a PM talk about the importance of skills alongside knowledge, which we have not heard for a while. However, I still have a few concerns. The White Paper paints a pretty linear picture of progression, but students do not progress in a linear manner. It suggests that, at 5 to 16, you can have a knowledge-based curriculum dictated by the EBacc, and then you pick up skills at 16-plus, but it does not work like that. There is no mention of or emphasis on creativity, and technical skills are being squeezed out of the curriculum at 5 to 16. At 16, it splits students into academic and higher education—in other words, those who are going to university and those who are not, which is not helpful either.

Using myself as an example, I was a lost cause at 16. I had three O-levels and was going nowhere, and then the apprenticeship helped me to get back on that ladder. I got that first degree and then the second degree, and then went into education. Many students mature only at 17 or 18 years old, so splitting them into those pathways early on does not really help anybody.

I have some concerns about the T-levels. I know that I am flitting around a little here. Some big universities, such as Cambridge, Imperial and Queen Mary, having already have come out and said that they will not accept T-levels as entry qualifications. Quite a lot of the Russell group have said that they have severe doubts as to whether they will accept them. My concern is that, if you split at 16, those who are going to university will do A-levels and those who are not will do T-levels. If the universities are not accepting them, we have big problems.

I sat in on the previous session, and the role of parents cannot be underestimated here. Parents really have a large effect on what their children do and what pathway they take. If you had no experience of and no emphasis on skills acquisition up to the age of 16, it is a huge switch to ask parents to take. As a head teacher, many times I sat in front of parents. There was a major broadcaster not far from my school that was delivering degree apprenticeships, but the parents would not let their children do them. They wanted them to go to university, because that is the route that they understood. There is still an awful lot of explaining to do there, and I do not believe that you can just switch it on at 16.

Technical does not and cannot mean lower ability. There are so many technical jobs out there, requiring high and low ability, and we should not split the two. The White Paper drifts into that. I know that there was a lot of noise leading up to the White Paper about this need for parity, but I have to emphasise that there needs to be parity. Parents and students at 16 do not want to see an A-class qualification that they can go for or “something else you can do if you cannot make that”. That is just not good enough for our students.

The Chair: Thank you all. I found those really helpful answers, and I would have many supplementary questions, but I suspect that we are going to cover them now as we go through the rest of the questioning.

Q171 **Lord Empey:** Good morning. Could I ask this question in the first instance to Jennifer? It has been touched on that, in recent years, there has been a trend towards declining entries by young people in apprenticeships. What methods might prove most effective to increase take-up: employer incentives, public awareness, increased supply of places, greater funding availability, or any other suggestions that you might have?

Jennifer Coupland: The apprenticeship programme is an all-age programme, so it offers apprenticeship opportunities to young people and to older people who want to upskill or retrain later on in their career. Importantly, the apprenticeship programme is still dominated by young people. Over half, 54%, of apprenticeship starts in 2019-20 were for young people under the age of 25. When you look at the proportion of young people in the labour market, just 17% of the working-age population are under 25, so the apprenticeship programme is still doing a pretty good job for young people in helping them enter the labour market.

You rightly pick up on the fact that we have had some declining numbers, particularly at 16 to 18, and there are a number of things that we would want to do. The supply of places is going to be crucial. Sir John Holman was talking earlier about supply and demand. You cannot have an apprenticeship unless there is an employer there willing to offer it, and it is important that apprenticeships remain jobs, because that ensures the quality. The apprenticeship programme tends to reflect what is going on in the wider labour market. When the economy is doing well, you will see more apprenticeship opportunities coming up. We need to encourage employers, as much as possible, to offer apprenticeship places.

The current incentive schemes that have been put in place by the Government as a result of Covid-19, to try to give employers greater confidence to start recruiting apprentices again as they are coming out of the pandemic, are a positive short-term measure. We have done a fair bit of public awareness raising in the past. The Government's Fire It Up campaign was very successful in helping change people's perceptions about apprenticeships, but funding is a key feature of apprenticeship availability. One thing we could look at—and it is probably a good moment to look at—is how well the levy supports apprenticeships for those who are in the under-25 bracket.

There is a particular issue about SME access to levy funding. At the moment, it is great that the Government are allowing small and medium-sized businesses that do not pay the levy to reserve up to 10 apprenticeship places, but, looking down the track, we need to make sure that we can maintain an affordable programme and that we have the right choices and trade-offs happening within it in terms of where that levy funding goes. That is going to be important for small businesses particularly, as they are the biggest employer of young apprentices.

Comment [KS]: fine

Lord Empey: What about a situation where employers are using much older workers? Some people see that they are not really apprenticeships, but they are using the levy simply to do what is and would be necessary for the progression of individual companies. Is it an abuse of the system?

Jennifer Coupland: One of the challenges in the apprenticeship programme is that it tries to do a number of things. It tries to be a programme that enables entry into the labour market for young apprentices. It also tries to be a programme that will plug the well-identified skills gaps in STEM, for example, at levels 4 and 5, those higher technical levels where we have long acknowledged that the country does not have enough people working. It also tries to be a programme for social mobility, so it has a lot of things going on within it.

When we first saw the introduction of the levy, there was a very natural reaction from some large levy-paying employers to think quite short term about how best they could spend their levy. At the beginning of that period, there was probably some conversion into apprentices of people who were not the kind of folk you would normally think would benefit from that. That is changing and, as we will see through the statistics over the next couple of years, the shape and nature of the programme is altering as employers work their way through their workforce and think about how they build their skills pipelines for the future.

Tom Dower: I would like to pick up on the point about SMEs. It is very easy to look at large companies. I did it earlier when I talked about our founding companies. At UTC South Durham, we work with over 150 organisations and employer partners, and they are mostly SMEs. They have less capacity to understand things like the levy. It is more risk when they take on individuals. Quite often, they have been burned in the past by employing apprentices who have not lasted. The key for them is having those good experiences: the good experience of a confident, well-trained youngster, with proactive support from a college. Then they come back next year and want two apprentices rather than the one they had last time. Suddenly, they see that as the route to their new employees, rather than having to hire experienced people. It is about that confidence, which will come from experience, but that is where technical education is so important in providing bright young people who are ready for work.

Jennifer Coupland: I endorse what the previous person was saying, because we have seen that borne out in our data. Once employers get on board with the apprenticeship programme, they really recognise the benefits that apprentices bring to their organisations and then are more inclined to employ apprentices in the future. There is something about bringing more employers into the programme, so that they can start to see for themselves the benefits that apprenticeships can bring them.

Tony Ryan: I endorse the route in for SMEs. We work with a great number of very small design companies that would love to take an apprentice on but are finding that first step very difficult. As much help as we can give SMEs, these very small, eight to 10-employee companies, to take somebody on would be really beneficial.

At the other end of that, is it an abuse of the system? I am not sure. I have seen companies that have transitioned the way that they manufacture, bringing in AI, machine learning and new machines that cost millions of pounds, and have used the apprenticeship system to retrain some of their elderly staff who, otherwise, would have been made unemployed. I would not say that that is an abuse; it is a very clever use of the system in reskilling employees who are very highly skilled rather than making them unemployed.

The Chair: Do you have any numbers on that? How common is it?

Tony Ryan: Before Covid, I was bumping into it quite frequently, going around the country and visiting manufacturing plants where they were using it quite extensively to retrain staff. I do not have numbers that I could present to you. It is pretty anecdotal, but I was seeing it quite a lot.

The Chair: The point is useful to know, however.

Q172 **Lord Layard:** Jennifer, could I ask you to expand on this issue of the purpose of the apprenticeship system? As you say, there are two purposes: first, to get young people off to a good start in life with a proper level of skill, and secondly to retrain people who need to retrain. Many people would think that the prime duty of the state is to get every young person off to a good start in life. Until you have done that, the funding of retraining should be mainly left to employers. The money that is levied by or on behalf of the state, including the apprenticeship levy, has the prime duty of getting everybody off to a good start. Until you have done that, you have not really achieved what you set out to do.

I wanted to ask a factual question. Do you have information on the balance between the demand from young people for apprenticeships and the number of apprenticeships being offered? If there is great excess demand, as I would suppose there is, what is your preferred strategy for dealing with the problem of not enough apprenticeships being offered to under-25s?

Jennifer Coupland: That is quite a complicated question. At the moment, 54% of people taking up apprenticeships in the programme are under 25, and 46% are older, so it is broadly half and half. Some 17% of young people in the labour market are in that under-25 bracket, so the programme is working in that regard.

It is a policy choice as to whether you want to have an apprenticeship programme that services the needs of young people as well as older workers. The Government have made a policy choice that they want an all-age programme, because we need to have a high-quality vehicle for older people to upskill or retrain. That is particularly going to be important post Covid, as the economy starts to reset itself.

I have lost my thread slightly, so could you repeat the final part of your question?

Lord Layard: Do you have information on the balance between supply and demand for people under 25? If there is inadequate supply of places

for under-25s, do you have a strategy for tackling that problem?

Jennifer Coupland: There are more applicants for apprenticeship places than there are apprenticeship places in the under-25 age group. They are oversubscribed. Some apprenticeships, such as the large car manufacturing apprenticeships such as **(mechatronics) engineering**, have more applicants per place than Oxford and Cambridge degrees do, so there is an appetite among young people for apprenticeships. It is a competitive market.

Comment [KS]: fine

You could make a choice about whether to have a young-person-only programme, but you would then need to answer the question of what the process is for training older workers. Before the levy was introduced, we had quite a lot of evidence that employers were reducing the amount of training they were offering to employees who were already employed. The levy has been a contributor to course correcting on that and increasing the amount of training that older workers are getting while they are in employment.

Lord Layard: On the balance question, just as there is for some universities, there is overdemand for some employers. By and large, at the aggregate level, there are as many university places being provided as there are people who are qualified for and want to go to university. That is the situation that you would want to get to with apprenticeships. Do you have the means of calculating how many people are applying for apprenticeships—not a particular apprenticeship but one of any kind? They will be sending in many applications, so can you compare that with the number of places being offered?

Jennifer Coupland: The National Apprenticeship Service runs the digital “find an apprenticeship” platform where people can view apprenticeship vacancies and apply, so it will have data on the number of applications per apprentice. I do not have it to hand, but I am sure we can find it and send it on to the committee.

Q173 Lord Storey: I take the point, which has really made me think, about whether older staff should be reskilled or upskilled because they might face unemployment, but is the issue not about the levy itself? If the levy is unspent, it has to be returned to the Treasury and is lost from education, so to speak. Employers are going to look at ways of trying to keep their money. If they cannot attract young apprentices, an option is to use the money to develop their older staff. Based on figures from the utilities and energy companies, something like £40 million of their apprenticeship levy is returned to the Treasury; it is lost.

Jennifer Coupland: At the moment, there is a two-year sunset for levy funds, where businesses are allowed a two-year period in which to spend it. The levy was introduced in 2017, and people are still getting used to how the thing operates, so that will become easier for people. The Government are also doing quite a lot of work to try to make it easier for levy-paying employers to transfer their levy funds to small businesses in their areas, either within their supply chain or more broadly, because they want to do some social good. I think we will see an increasing take-

up of that facility going forward. That is going to make a contribution to this as well.

Tom Dower: I have no problem at all with some of the levy being used for slightly older employees. Think about the people who missed out because they are five years older than the young people of today and perhaps did not have the training. Employers see a huge potential in somebody who is relatively underqualified at the moment because of the education that they had, and it is a really good use of funds if that is the case, but there has to be a balance.

On the point of some apprenticeships being hugely in demand, that is absolutely true. There are also quite a few smaller companies that are struggling to find the right person for them and would be very happy with the first reject from a large company. A brokering system is needed in order to say, "Let's get a young person out there. If they're not going to be successful with their first application, is there a method that we can use centrally to pass them on to other organisations as potential employees?" Those companies that do not quite know how to organise themselves, as Tony mentioned, are otherwise missing out on that talent.

Tony Ryan: I have one employer in mind that makes precision parts for aircraft in rural Leicestershire. Without the use of the levy, if it had made employees redundant, it would not have been a case of just going out and finding new employees, because of where it is located. It would have had to relocate in order to find the right level of employee. It is a very delicate balance, because some companies are seeing it as an additional tax if they do not use it. There is no doubt about that. They say that, if they do not use it, they lose the money, as you rightly say. Some are finding it difficult to access it, but others are seeing it as an essential lifeline that allows them to develop their company into what they need to be in order to make them competitive in a global market. It is very delicate.

Q174 **Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall:** In relation to the last point that Mr Ryan made, the apprenticeship levy works very well where it works, but there are whole sectors where it really does not work at all. That is not just small and medium-sized businesses, although that clearly is the case, but particular sectors. It does not work well for the creative industries, for example, at the moment, and there are a lot of job opportunities there.

That is sort of what I wanted to ask about. I wanted to examine this question of the EBacc and the national curriculum, and why certain subjects have, effectively, been marginalised. This is evidenced by the fact that entry for examination in a number of them has dropped off really catastrophically. It is true of design and technology, in which Mr Ryan has a particular interest. It feels to me as though this goes to the value that we place on certain subjects.

I wondered, Mr Ryan, if you could tell us, very specifically, why you think design and technology has been marginalised in the way that it has, and what we can do to increase the take-up. Parental influence may have something to do with this. Do you or your colleagues have any

observations more widely about the impact of the national curriculum and, in particular, the EBacc on the way that students are making choices and viewing their prospects? That would be very helpful.

Tony Ryan: I could write a book on this, so I am going to try to keep it succinct. It helps to get a feel for the numbers. We have gone from a high, where we pushing 400,000 entries at GCSE, to last year, when it was 98,500. It has been quite a dramatic decline. Blaming all of that on the EBacc alone is misleading, for reasons that I will explain, but it has definitely had an effect.

We need to look at the nature of design and technology as a subject. There are a lot of misconceptions about what the subject is, which still hang on in school. Some of them are perpetuated by what still goes on in some schools, I have to say, but in many schools the subject is a million miles away from where it was even five years ago.

D&T is, by nature, a multidisciplinary subject. We take the science, the maths, the geography and the English, and we give that learning context. You connect it with a real problem that students can engage with. In my experience as a secondary head teacher, that context for learning is critical. If students can understand why they are learning what they are learning, all of a sudden it all makes sense.

I am going to give you a very quick anecdote. We connected with a local company, Brompton Bikes. I will name the company because I think it is relevant. The CEO came in and gave a talk to a group of students. I had students chasing me along the corridor, asking me what they had to do to get a C grade, as it was at the time, in mathematics, because the CEO had said, "To work in my company as an engineer, you need that C grade in maths". When you have students chasing you down the corridor saying, "I'm on a D and I need a C; what do I do?" you know something is right, and that is all about context. That is really important. We also encourage students to use the knowledge that they are picking up across the curriculum. We ask them to use the maths and science, and put them to work: "You've learned this in science. Now let's see how we could use that in order to make a solution to a problem". We are solving real-life problems in design and technology.

The perception of many parents, I have to say, is that the subject has not moved on, which is not helped by the fact that, when you go into schools, it looks, smells and feels much the same. Parents will come in and think, "Yes, I remember this. We made a clock and a box of some sort". We are not about that. The change to the GCSE four years ago, which I will come to in a minute, was a seismic shift from an emphasis purely on making to an emphasis on design thinking. There was very little training that went with that for teachers. They either picked it up and ran with it, or did not, and that has been a problem as well.

At its best, the subject creates the engineers, designers and creatives of the future. It maintains a student's curiosity, which is something that we should all be engaged with at secondary level. That sense of curiosity can die as you get to 14, 15 and 16. If you go into a primary school, it is

alive. We have to keep it alive, because that is what employers want, and our subject does that so well.

At its worst, even if you are not going to go on and work in the tech sectors, the ability to know what climate change is and why it is happening, and to work out what you can do as an individual to affect that climate change in a positive way, will engage students. Students really care about this stuff. As a head, when I asked students what motivates them, money came into it, but that was not their main motivator. Their main motivator was to make a difference with what they do. Education loses that sometimes: "Get a better job and you'll earn more money". We should be saying to students, "Get a better job and you'll make a bigger difference", because that is what really matters. We teach students how to use technology in a sustainable manner. Our students understand what sustainability is and why it is important, and are, therefore, more likely to take it into their own lives.

The association has started a teachers in residence programme, where we have realised that many of our teachers have followed the traditional route from teaching, to university, and back into school. When a student asks, "What's it like to be an engineer?", you do not have any reference point for that; you have nothing to refer back to. We are offering teachers a three to five-day placement in business and industry, where they sit in and they work. That is doing a few things. That teacher goes back and teaches, on average, 320 students during a week. They now have a direct reference point about industry and how it works. Also, business is saying, "We're learning so much about education from that placement that we thought we knew but we didn't", which is really important.

Why have the numbers dropped? I have bullet-pointed a list here. We have a shortage of specialist teachers, which is getting worse every year. We have not reached target for the last eight years at least, and we are the worst recruited of all subjects. That is an area that needs urgent attention. We need to recruit design and technology specialists. Then there is a misconception from all stakeholders about the subject. We do not make boxes and clocks any more. We have moved on and gone a long way from that.

The emphasis on accountability has meant that non-EBacc tends to be put into basket 3, and students can choose one creative subject, if they are lucky. In some schools, they do not even have that option. If you love art, and you love design and technology, why can you not do both? The accountability system does not allow that in schools at the moment. You do one or the other, or neither. That is the issue.

There is a lack of subject CPD, which you could say about any subject. In design and technology, the pace of change in business is so fast that, if you do not have subject-specific CPD for two, three or four years, you are going to be teaching way behind the curve. It is noticeable, and many of the teachers we survey say that they have not had professional development in over three years.

The last thing is a lack of connection with universities. Before universities

said that they were no longer going to use facilitating subjects, D&T was not a facilitating subject for one single degree across the country. However, when you ask universities whether they see this as a useful qualification for students to have, many will say that, for the courses that they have, they see a difference when students who have done A-level design and technology come in.

The previous session was about careers advice and the importance of it. If I want to be an engineer, there are now far more routes than just having maths and physics. There are different ways that you can get in. UCL now has a degree where you can enter in different ways; you do not need maths and physics.

If I was going to put forward recommendations, I would prefer that the EBacc disappeared completely, because it is divisive. If we have to have it, design and technology needs to be part of it, for the sake of the economy. We need to invest in ITE and encourage more specialists to train in design and technology. Subject CPD is essential, and the only way you are going to get that is if you ring-fence that money in school for training. If you just put more money into school, there will be other priorities that will take that money away.

We need support. We have a programme that we are running in the association called Blueprint 1000. It is quite corny, because, over the next five years, we want to connect 1,000 schools with employers. The idea of it is that, if you work with a local or national employer, you can bring real context to that learning in school and join the two up. As an ex-head, I put a lot of emphasis on that.

As has already been mentioned, a lot of heads have so many priorities with the accountability system that bringing in those links with industry and business is probably way down the list of priorities. It needs somebody like the Design and Technology Association to go to the school and say, "We have these employers that want to work with you. We can join that up for you and bring those two together".

I have two more points and then I promise I will stop. First, the subject is thriving in the private sector. We have to ask why. If you are paying £30,000 a year, why do parents see this as an essential subject that has to be taught, and yet, in the state system, it is falling apart? That question needs to be answered.

Secondly, we have seen a huge growth at primary level in the last two years, which is driven by Ofsted, which has said that you need a broad and rich curriculum. A number of primary schools have been caught out on that by Ofsted and, all of a sudden, we have primary school leaders beating a path to our door, saying, "We've not taught design and technology for years. We now need to teach it". There is growth there of about 18,000 teachers across the country over the last 18 months, so it is huge. We can build on that and bring that growth into secondary, if we grab it now.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Thank you very much. That was very comprehensive. A lot of what you say about design and technology could

equally be applied to some other subjects, where we are really slipping quite badly and losing capacity. It also strikes me, Mr Ryan, that your point about teachers is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we do not teach the subject at school, we will not get the teachers coming back in to teach it later—but I do not need you to answer on that one.

I wanted to try to wrap this in to thinking about the way that the university technical colleges design their curriculum and how that is different. By the way, Mr Ryan, your point about the private education sector is extremely well made, because so many of the things that we have decided not to value in the public provision of education are absolutely up there, exactly as you say, including art, music, drama and sport.

Mr Dower, could you talk about the university technical colleges, perhaps bearing in mind what we have just heard? How is the curriculum different? How do you measure your success? In what ways, overall, do you think—because I suspect that you do—that the national curriculum could be improved by studying what you are up to?

Tom Dower: Yes, I do. I have a couple of responses to what Tony was talking about there. I agree with everything he said. I am a passionate design and technology teacher myself. It is not about a lack of interest from young people, but about performance tables, exam results and budgets. I agree that there is a vicious cycle of a lack of high-quality staff, which means that young people are not then responding to those experiences.

UTCs are quite different. There are 48 of us around the country, each with a specialism or two in the STEM field, based on regional need. We are not subject to EBacc; we deliver GCSE subjects. All my students are studying English language, English literature, maths, and two or three science qualifications, so they are getting that core academic curriculum, but then they have that choice of a range of technical subjects. I have students who will be studying robotics and systems engineering alongside design and technology or computer science. It is that technical aspect that is the identifier of UTCs.

I really hate that we might have become the preserve of technical education. We have really high-quality applicants for technical jobs coming to us from local schools saying, “You will value me”, and that cannot be right, because we need this type of education across the whole sector. My stance would certainly be to remove EBacc and to make sure that the links to universities and industry are absolutely right.

On UTCs, young people travel from across the whole region to get that type of education. I wrote recently to the 14 MPs representing our students who travel to UTC South Durham every day, so that gives the subregional spread. I completely agree with Robert Halfon’s ambition to have a UTC in every town across the country.

We have to come back, to be honest, to the purpose of education. For me, the purpose of education is about ensuring that young people are career and life ready, and that means three things. It means academic

and technical knowledge and understanding. It means qualifications, and it is important that students are achieving GCSEs and A-levels or the equivalent. But it is also about employability skills, which were mentioned in the previous session, such as communication, teamwork, organisation and perseverance, which employers can see when they are hiring. Crucially, it gives young people the confidence to enter the workplace, and that confidence is absolutely vital.

Then it is about professional and career experiences, and getting out into industry visits, placements and work experience, because that means that young people will have a genuine understanding of their options. It is not a conceptual thing; they have seen it in real life. They are motivated about their future and more confident in their career choice, and that makes them incredibly employable.

UTCs have a technical focus, so it is partly about that with the careers, the equipment and so on. The thing that makes UTC education really work is about the style of education, starting at 13 or 14 and treating students as young professionals. We are on first-name terms with our students. I am a colleague of theirs, working with them on their career. If you start from that point, suddenly they are not treated as naughty pupils who need to behave, fall in line and be silent in corridors. They are treated as young professionals and they rise to that challenge.

UTCs have some tough children coming to us. Many students who come to UTCs are highly motivated by technology and might be very academically able, but there are also plenty who are just not getting on with education. If we treat them as young professionals, suddenly we see a transformation in their prospects. We have a long working week, with our students doing 31 hours of education, compared with 25 in most schools. They are doing more than an extra day's worth of education and are travelling to get to it. Meaningful employer engagement is vital.

Parents' evenings at the UTC are different. They are not done to a student but owned by them. Our students prepare a speech based on feedback from teachers in order to give their parents an appraisal of where they are at.

To answer one of your questions, that style of education, apart from the technical bit, is perfectly possible in any school. We have been working with the Edge Foundation and Ford Next Generation Learning from the United States, and a network of schools in the north-east and now in Scotland, which are really demonstrating that a different type of project-based learning, with a different focus, can work anywhere. It is vitally important that the performance measures and the pressure of exams are alleviated in order for schools to be allowed to do that.

I have no idea whether I have answered all the questions, but I hope some of them at least.

Jennifer Coupland: The institute's focus is post 16, so we do not stray into the pre-16 school curriculum. We are all about trying to make sure that those post-16 technical options are really high quality.

Tony Ryan: I have seen students absolutely transformed going from a mainstream school to a UTC. It is about how they are treated. It is about what they wear—they wear business attire. They turn up early and put in the hours, and they are treated as adults. The emphasis goes from the teacher being the deliverer of all knowledge to the student drawing the knowledge that they need, which is a really important shift. You can do that with all schools, but it is not easy. What UTCs have in their favour is their size. They are quite small, in the main, and, as a result, it is easier to implement these things, but that does not mean that we cannot aspire to do that on a larger scale.

Q175 Lord Clarke of Nottingham: We have heard no mention at all so far this morning, in either of our sessions, of programmes such as Kickstart or traineeships. They are meant to be a route, for those pupils who can benefit from it, into apprenticeships and T-levels. Does that route work? Is it understood? Does the careers guidance that pupils get explain that to them? Is Kickstart a useful thing? What do you think of traineeships and Kickstart? Is there a clear route into the next step, which we hope, for a lot of people, will be a good apprenticeship?

Tony Ryan: I would like to think that, for students who perhaps have been unemployed for a while, the Kickstart scheme is a lifeline that they can grab hold of, and then there will be a route through. I do not know enough about it to add any more than that at the moment.

Jennifer Coupland: From the institute's perspective, it is really important that we have great routes into apprenticeships and T-levels. Traineeships have been around for quite a while now; it is an established brand. It is a great pre-apprenticeship that can give young people a route into those apprenticeships. Kickstart is a newer programme targeted at young people who might remain unemployed and on universal credit for an extended period. It definitely has value but, because it is relatively new, the employers we deal with are less familiar with that part of the landscape.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: I want to touch on another thing that has been a feature all morning and is very important, which is getting more SMEs to take on board their involvement in this. Until a few years ago, SMEs had got increasingly used just to recruiting any skilled staff they needed from overseas or staff other people had trained.

Since the levy was introduced, we have seen that it particularly applies to larger companies, which, understandably, have an incentive to get their money back. There are undoubtedly accounts that levy funds are being used to put their junior management teams through business training and degree courses that they would have expected as part of the ordinary cost of the business.

Meanwhile, although Jennifer was rather reassuring about it, there has been a drop in level 2 and 3 training, and a drop in the proportion of young people under the age of 24 benefiting from levy-funded apprenticeships. Is there a case for reducing the threshold at which people are subject to the levy and bringing more SMEs in by that route? In addition to SMEs being brought into the levy and getting on with it, do

they need more incentives to enable them to come in? Can you think of any incentives that they might be given?

Jennifer Coupland: Taking your final point first, there are quite a lot of financial incentives available at the moment for small and medium-sized businesses.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: Are they adequate?

Jennifer Coupland: Well, £3,000 as an incentive to take on a new young apprentice would certainly make me think about whether I wanted to get into the programme. If you are a small business that is thinking, "Maybe I should do this", it is a sufficiently large figure that might tip you over into doing it. That is a positive thing.

We experienced some challenges towards the back end of 2019 in managing the affordability of the whole programme, which is an issue I touched on earlier. There were a number of small businesses coming to the institute, saying that they wanted to take on an apprentice. They had gone to their local college but could not get funding for the apprentice's training, because their levy funds were being restricted to make sure that the programme was affordable overall. I really hope that, at this time looking ahead, we can think a little more creatively about how we might manage that, because I am sure that there are some things we could do to head that issue off sooner rather than later. I do not have the answers yet, but we should be thinking about it.

The question of whether the levy should be extended to cover more firms is tricky. We are coming out of a global pandemic. It is a really challenging time for organisations. There are political choices to be made about whether this is the time **(to)** lever a wider range of employers into contributing to the programme, so that one is quite a tough call.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: You were giving some reassuring reactions to older employees who might otherwise face redundancy being given training. I entirely accept that there is a case for doing something particularly about those who have been made redundant, say in their 50s, and who are definitely going to need retraining to resume their careers.

Should some restrictions be placed on what, in a rapidly changing world, both technically and in markets, should be a normal cost for a large business of putting people through some sort of additional training at various stages in their career? At the moment, we get the impression that quite a bit of the levy goes on management training, which was the example I gave. Can you think of anything that we can do about that? The employer should expect that to be an ordinary cost to the business, in many cases, for the retraining or the raising of standards of existing employees.

Jennifer Coupland: There is a fair bit of evidence that one of the drags on productivity is that we tend to train our senior managers less than our competitor countries in Europe. The levy is contributing to course correcting on that and improving the leadership capabilities in our country, and companies across the piece make a contribution to that. I

Comment [KS]: fine

have met many older apprentices who are undertaking career changes. My brother-in-law is an ex-police officer who is now training to be a teaching assistant in a primary school in Staffordshire as an apprentice. There are lots of stories like this out there of people who have taken a career swerve and are doing something different as a result of the apprenticeship opportunities out there.

When we were working on the Richard review of apprenticeships back in 2012, one of the criteria that Doug Richard was keen to see being a feature of the programme going forward was that apprenticeships should be available where they are a new job or a new role. We did not really pursue that as a feature of policy going forward, so we do not really look at whether someone has been in a role for a considerable time and they are using it for upskilling or retraining. There are choices there, and you could look at those kinds of things again.

At the point where we are now, as I said before, we are trying to do as much as possible to support businesses either to train new employees or to upskill or retrain older employees in order to help us recover from the pandemic.

Tom Dower: I would want to see the levy threshold reducing. That would be a positive thing for SMEs. There is also something really important about the confidence that SMEs might have and the advice that they might be getting about this. I mentioned this earlier, but there is probably a role to play for industry network organisations, both local and national. We can work with them in supply chains to make sure that training and advice is given to those SMEs. There are places that they can go to for help, but the capacity to do so, to get out there and to really understand it is lacking at the moment.

Tony Ryan: You have a very valid point with regard to large companies using quite substantial sums that they have paid into the levy in order to do management training et cetera. I would have thought that that would have been a standard cost for a large business to train up its employees. That is a different case from a company that is transitioning its manufacturing plant from one position to another in order to stay competitive in Europe or worldwide. I see those as being very different.

There is a push and pull here, in that we are driven by need. There will be growth over the next 12 months to two years. SMEs will need to grow and there will need to be as many incentives as possible. I agree that the £3,000 is great, but that £3,000 starts you. When you take on an apprentice, it is a three-year programme at least, in which you are looking to bring this apprentice up to a skill level where you hope to then get a good number of years out of them working for you. It is a longer-term commitment, which SMEs find very difficult. They want a solution now, rather than one that they can grow themselves. That perhaps needs to be looked at again.

Q176 Lord Davies of Oldham: I am in great danger of taking on the Chair's role at this point, because our three contributors have made such an excellent job of informing this Committee on crucial issues. The question I was going to ask has already been fully covered, and that was on the

relationship between the curriculum in schools, the strategy of schools and the position of what students would need to follow in order to become technically equipped in their subsequent careers. There is no doubt but that, with the green revolution and the development of digitalisation, the challenges for people to adapt to fresh strategies are very great indeed.

What I derived from this morning's session is a great deal of confidence in all three of you in terms of how you see the situation developing and how we can ensure that we get the appropriate engineers and technically equipped people for the future. It has been a most valuable session. That is for the Chair to say, not me, but I congratulate all three contributors for what they have said this morning.

The Chair: I would like to ask a set of questions in relation to further information that the committee might find helpful to receive from you, but was there anything about what Lord Davies said that anybody wanted to respond to?

Jennifer Coupland: Thinking about future skills needs, it is worth saying that it is going to be a priority for the institute going forward. As I mentioned, we have thousands of employers that we work with already. We have 15 route panels, which are experts in different sectors across the economy and work with us to develop and approve new apprenticeships and, in time, new technical qualifications. We are trying to develop with them more foresight particularly on the green skills agenda, because we feel that that is a particular area for growth, with the Government's targets around net zero and so forth. Trying to make sure that we get ahead of the curve on the skills that we will need to meet those ambitions is going to be a real focus for us over the next couple of years.

Tony Ryan: I endorse that completely. I recently saw Pamela Kearney speak. She is head of HR for Amazon Europe, and one of the questions posed was whether automation is a threat or an opportunity. The answer, which I was going to put, is that it is an opportunity, but our education system is not keeping up with changes that are happening in the world. Our education system is dated. If we change the education system to prepare students, what she said was that, in an age of increased automation, creativity is going to be the thing that we really value. That creativity is no longer a large aspect of our five-to-16 system.

The businessman Dilbagh Gill, who is CEO and team principal of Mahindra Racing, when asked what he thought about education, said, "I think there's a danger that it's broken. When I was young, teachers taught us how to memorise answers. We should now be training students how to ask better questions". That is gold dust. That is what our education system should be doing.

We should be empowering students, because this mental health issue that we have at the moment is very real, just looking at my kids and their friends. This last 12 to 18 months has really hit all students, and mental health comes with empowerment. We need to give the sort of education that Tom was describing, where we give ownership back to

students. It is their education and their school. They need to control their future, and we need to help them do that. I know that that might sound like a bit of a speech, but I am very passionate about this. We need to change the education system to help students more. I am talking about accountability.

The Chair: I have written down the words “mental health comes with empowerment”, so thank you for that.

Tom Dower: I agree completely with what Tony and Jennifer said about that skills focus and the need for our education system to change. Going back to the previous session about that careers focus, if we can transform our education system to become career-focused and to help young people become career and life ready, we have a real chance of being a massive force for good.

The career path for my students and their destinations are more important to me than exam results. Exam results are an important step on the way, but it is that career path that matters to me more than anything else. Destinations are the primary measure of success for UTCs. What matters is that each individual has a career path that really works for them, and I do not mind what that is.

For our 18 year-olds who have left for the last three years—we have had only three years of leavers—everybody who has wanted to go to university has done so. They have all gone to their first choice and all gone to study STEM subjects. It has varied each year and it does not matter to me how many go to university. It is about what is right for them. Two-thirds of our students have gone to apprenticeships, and two-thirds of those last year were at degree level.

We have not had any NEETs in that post-18 cohort at all. In the network of UTCs, the NEET figures are very low. I had one student who left year 11 last year who was classified as NEET, out of the three previous cohorts. Everybody else has had a meaningful destination. If we get careers education right, and if we change not just the careers advice that we give but the whole of our education system towards careers, we can transform that landscape for those students, which is so important.

The Chair: Thank you all very much for that. I just want to move almost to the end, but there are three areas where the committee might benefit from some written evidence, if there are things that you think we should have our attention drawn to.

We have mentioned T-levels, and it is really a question of how the first year of T-level rollout has gone. What are the problems about T-levels? We have had reference this morning to attitudes of, say, the Russell group towards T-levels, so anything in writing that you would like to give us on that would be useful.

There is a specific question to Tom Dower about data showing UTCs' success rates with people who have protected characteristics or who face disadvantages due to socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity or additional needs. We get the broader statistics about numbers and percentages going on to apprenticeships and university, but we would

find it useful to have anything further in writing on those categories.

Tony, there is a slightly bigger job for you here. I took careful note of what you were saying about public knowledge around design and technology, and I am interested in any statistics that you can give the committee from 2010, not just from 2015, as we get in some cases. What is the drop in design and technology GCSEs? There is no need to answer now, and I am quite happy to have them in writing later. I am also interested in A-level design and technology: how many there were in summer 2020 and whether there is any trend analysis that you can provide to the committee.

Finally, on the destinations of students who took design and technology, how many went on to apprenticeships, found jobs or went to FE and pathways to university? What can you provide for us on the destinations of students who have done design and technology? There is not too much work there. I guess these figures exist somewhere, but it would be helpful for the committee to have them.

I have got to the end of this session and I have nobody asking to say anything further. I want to extend the committee's thanks to you all for the quality of your presentations and responses to us, and the level of preparation that you have put into this. It makes our job a great deal easier when witnesses are so very well prepared, so thank you from all of us.