



Youth Unemployment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Youth unemployment

Tuesday 29 June 2021

10.15 am

Watch the meeting

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

Evidence Session No. 18

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 177 - 194

Witness

I: Sean Harford HMI (Her Majesty's Inspector), National Director for Education, Ofsted.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witness

Sean Harford.

Q177 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, and you will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary. Welcome to this first oral evidence session today. I welcome Sean Harford, national director for education for Ofsted. Sean, could I ask you to say a word or two first about yourself?

Sean Harford: Thank you, Lord Shipley. I am one of Her Majesty's inspectors. I am also the national director for education for Ofsted. My role is to oversee inspection policy in education remits, which runs from early years through schools, including some independent schools, into further education and skills, which includes GFE colleges, sixth-form colleges and prison education. Thank you for having me today.

Q178 The Chair: Thank you for giving us the benefit of your experience and knowledge.

First, I want to ask you a general catch-all question about the role of Ofsted in ensuring the provision of a quality education for all young people in England that equips them with the knowledge and skills they are going to need.

Secondly, can you put that in the context of Covid? Has anything altered because of Covid? What are the long-term implications for Ofsted's evaluation of schools' provision? Is there anything else you want to say before we move on to other questioners?

Sean Harford: Our role, of course, is as the inspectorate for all the remits that I set out. You have picked up on schools and we will talk about colleges, no doubt. In doing so, we publicly report on individual providers of education—schools and colleges. Our remit is enshrined in law and was set up back in the late 1980s/early 1990s to do just that. Not only do we report on and grade the quality of education, and grade those providers in their overall effectiveness, but we carry out surveys and research to try to get underneath particular educational problems of the day.

Covid, as you mentioned, has been one of those issues over the last 15 or 16 months. It has brought great problems to the education sector. I am sure we will get into some of those. Apprenticeships, which I know the committee is interested in, have been particularly hit, as has the ability to provide industry placements for other students.

There have been real problems for the sector. From March last year, the Secretary of State for Education suspended routine inspection because of the pandemic. By September, schools and colleges were back in various forms, face to face as well as remote. We carried out listening visits during that term to find out what was going on in these sectors. Of course, nobody knew how to handle a pandemic, neither our inspectors

nor head teachers and principals, so we were all in learning mode then. By January, we were carrying out remote monitoring inspections. We were hoping to be on site at that point. Because of the second lockdown, we could not do that for safety reasons, but we were looking at how schools and colleges were providing education in those circumstances.

I am glad to say that, from Easter onwards this year, we have been able to get into schools, colleges and independent learning providers to start to properly assess what is going on for the children and young people. Actually, they are doing quite well. On schools, for example, we have been going into grades 3 and 4, the lowest grades for how we assess them—"inadequate" and "requires improvement". Last time I looked, last week, around 20 schools had come out of the category of concern this term, despite having gone through Covid. It is not all doom and gloom. The places are responding well to it.

Longer term, the learning that has been lost needs to be caught up. Our job will be to assess how those places are going about catching up on that learning for those children and young people, because it is just so important to their future.

- Q179 **The Chair:** Colleagues will in a moment be exploring further some of the things you have covered. Could I ask you about something that I would like to understand a bit better, which is the other nations? I referred in my question to England, but there is Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Could you explain to the committee how you work with their organisations? In terms of sharing good practice and learning of things that might be beneficial to do, to what extent are you all working together and learning from each other?

Sean Harford: We work very closely with Education Scotland, the Scottish inspectorate; with Estyn, the Welsh inspectorate; and with the Northern Irish inspectorate; as well as with that of the Republic of Ireland. We are colloquially known as the offshore inspectorates. That is a reference to not being on the European mainland. We work very closely, and during the pandemic I or my colleagues met with our counterparts probably every three or four weeks to find out how they were approaching their inspection and what they were doing to support providers in their jurisdictions. We regularly share good practice and how we are going about things.

There was very little between us in the way we approached inspection this year. It was mainly about finding out what was going on, trying to be supportive, and reporting publicly so that people could learn from the good practice that we were seeing. The relationship between the nations is alive and kicking, and doing very well, thank you.

- Q180 **Lord Clarke of Nottingham:** I might begin by asking what the role of careers guidance and work experience is in Ofsted's inspection of schools and the assessments you make of them. We are giving more and more emphasis to this. Young people leaving school find it a dramatic change to move from school into the world of work and seek employment, with bewilderingly different circumstances in different areas of the economy and so on.

How far does Ofsted fit into its inspection, its reporting and its advice the quality of careers guidance and work experience offered to pupils? What weight do you give to it compared with the many other measures of output and achievement that you have to look at?

Sean Harford: It is a key part of our assessment of the personal development of pupils and students. It sits alongside things like personal, social and health education, and relationships and sex education. It is a key part of the overall personal development curriculum for young people.

The government strategy for careers is that it should start in year 8 and go forward from there for young people. We look at the provision of that careers advice, information and guidance, and how it fits into the personal development curriculum. Then we make a judgment about things like the use of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation benchmarks and how they are met by schools. We look at the contacts that youngsters have with employers.

As a follow-up to the Education Selection Committee's inquiries into this recently, I have asked my teams to publish an update to the inspection handbook—in fact, we published it yesterday—to say that, if a school does not meet the Baker clause requirements, we will report on that in our personal development judgment in the report itself. We had not made that absolutely clear to inspectors previously. It was part of the training but, following on from the committee's inquiry into that, we thought it was the right thing to do to update that. From September, when we are hoping to get back into routine inspection, all inspections under the section 5 framework, which is the full inspections, will look at that and will report on adherence to the Baker clause.

We need to be clear, though, that, due to resourcing, a large proportion of schools these days are not fully inspected under Section 5 of the Act, but under Section 8 of the Act. That is the vast majority of good and outstanding schools. Those inspections are typically a couple of days with only one inspector, or two inspectors on the first day. That is where you meet the draws on resource you were alluding to and those other things we look at. It is a very light-touch, cut-down version of inspection. We would like more resource to do that. Unfortunately, at the moment that is not possible. We will report on those things and put them into the grading of personal development in full inspections, but not in those lighter-touch ones.

Q181 Lord Clarke of Nottingham: Do you have an overall judgment of how far we have gone in improving the quality of careers advice, and the availability and extent of work experience for people going through schools? My impression is that it is rather patchy across the country and that there is quite a wide difference between schools that have been very successful at it and those that really have not made much progress. That said, I do not have the adequate experience to form a judgment. What is your judgment and Ofsted's of the general state of careers guidance and work experience, and preparing people for the transition to their future careers? What is the quality like overall?

Sean Harford: We brought in a new framework in September 2019, and obviously we had only six months of that because of the pandemic. We recently did a trawl of 288 full inspection reports in that period. About three-quarters of the reports focused on careers education and advice. The vast majority overall came out good. Probably 80% to 85% are doing a reasonably good job at this. That is set alongside a number of other things that schools have to do.

We make judgements in a balanced way. Others are quite keen on this being something that you would fail schools on, as a single item. There are very few individual issues that would fail a school overall just on that one issue. Safeguarding is one of them. We tend not to work in those kinds of limiting judgment ways, because we have to give a balanced approach.

You are right that there is a spectrum of quality here. I have been looking at reports from UTCs recently. Some of these reports on what they provide for their youngsters are spot on for where we would want this to be for all youngsters. I will read you this point, from Sheffield City UTC. "Increasingly, pupils have chosen to attend this school because they want to be engineers or digital designers. The school understands its specialist character very well. Pupils understand that they are preparing for the workplace. High standards of appearance, conduct, work and responsibility are expected. To a high degree, pupils meet these expectations".

In a couple of sentences, this encapsulates the things that we all want youngsters to be doing. We do not want schools to become a conveyor belt for employment. That is not what it is about. It is about learning the kinds of attitudes and behaviours that prepare youngsters for the world of work that you just described.

- Q182 **Lord Storey:** I have two quick questions. First, in an inspection, if it was found that schools were not following the requirements of the so-called Baker clause, i.e. engaging with local further education colleges or UTCs by allowing them to come in and talk to students, would that be noted in the report? Secondly, I might just have missed this, and I apologise if I have, but could an outstanding school be outstanding even if it had very average or poor careers guidance?

Sean Harford: On the first of those, that is what I was referring to when I said that we had made some changes to the handbook, which we published yesterday. There was a requirement for inspectors in full inspections to consider the Baker clause. We did not put a requirement on them to actually report on it. We are saying now that they must report in their inspection report on that publicly, so that people will know whether the Baker clause requirements are being met. If they are not, that should be reported on.

In the trawl, we looked at inspection reports. No school that was judged outstanding had weak careers advice, guidance and education. We will use the word "good" colloquially here, but if we judged it in a graded way it would be possible for a school not to have good careers guidance and still be considered good overall, because it is a best-fit approach. Our

handbook sets out very clearly the criteria we consider. But you have to meet all those good criteria to be considered for outstanding. To be considered for good, it is a best fit, so it would be possible. It is unlikely that it would be poor, but it could be of a quality such that we would think, "That could be better, but there are redeeming features in the rest of the personal development offer to counteract that".

- Q183 Lord Davies of Oldham:** I wondered whether we could turn to the question of careers education and the role played by Ofsted in the evaluation of schools' and colleges' preparation for young people. It will be appreciated that this is an important concept in normal times, but in these very difficult times when young people are facing limited opportunities, the support we give them is essential. How is a young person assessed by Ofsted as being ready for work? Since you have been concerned with this role, do you consider that you have effected some improvement in the position of preparation for work?

Sean Harford: We do not assess individual children in anything that we look at in a school. We look at what the school does to promote improvement and learning across the piece. That is why we look at the careers education offer to youngsters as part of the personal development framework. It would be impossible for us to say whether an individual child had a good careers experience while at school. We look across the piece at the children in terms of the cohort.

We are particularly interested in special needs children as a group, however, because they clearly need a different kind of approach depending on their needs. Therefore, the offer for them and the support given might be quite different from that for other children. That would be a particular focus. Could you remind me of the second half of your question, please?

Lord Davies of Oldham: I was interested in the extent to which you think there has been improvement in provision since you have been playing this role.

Sean Harford: I understand. We do not have statistics on that, but I work with the Careers & Enterprise Company and we have been in quite close liaison over the last five or six years, since I have been in this role. Certainly, from its point of view, the number of schools meeting the Gatsby benchmarks was extremely low six years ago. That is probably understandable, because the benchmarks had not been in place for long or at all. Therefore, schools' focus was not necessarily on them.

As we have made it more central to inspection, there has been improvement. The Careers & Enterprise Company annual report shows the proportions of schools meeting the Gatsby benchmarks and how that has improved over the last four or five years. That is some evidence overall that things are getting better. One of the key Gatsby benchmarks is this idea of meaningful contact with employers. That is an area that has improved.

The Baker clause was really set up, as Lord Storey just alluded to, to encourage schools to make sure that the full offer post 16 or post 18 was

put in front of them, as opposed to what individual schools might just want to give the youngsters. I am hopeful that, from September, when we start reporting specifically in our reports on whether it is being met, it will encourage schools further still and that, in another year or two, we will be able to look back and see not only Baker clause adherence but greater Gatsby benchmark achievement.

Q184 Lord Woolley of Woodford: Good morning. I have two questions. Like my fellow Peers, I could ask 22 questions, but let us see where we go. How does Ofsted ensure that providers of technical education are effectively assessed on a par with other mainstream providers, recognising the different characteristics of these types of institutions and the needs and experiences of pupils within them?

Sean Harford: Since 2015, we have had what we have called a common inspection framework. It morphed into a new framework called the education inspection framework, but the principle of looking at schools and further education and skills providers through similar lenses of inspection, if you like, has helped to enable us to assess different providers that clearly have different jobs or different aims and ambitions for their pupils or students.

Within that framework, we have individual remit handbooks. There is a schools inspection handbook for inspectors in that sector and a separate further education and skills handbook. Even within the further education and skills handbook, the approaches that an independent training provider would take and how we would assess those are clear, compared with a GFE college, for example. We would look at the similarities, understand the differences and make sure that we benchmark the standards. That is the key thing, benchmarking the standards, while being able to recognise why they might go about things in a different way.

In the school sector, again, I will go to the UTC example. We do not have the same broad and balanced expectation of a curriculum for a UTC that we would for a school. There are different restrictions or strictures placed on them by government anyway. For example, they are not expected to meet Progress 8 or EBacc requirements, so again that changes our view of the curriculum. We have been very successful in identifying good and outstanding UTCs compared with good and outstanding schools, which clearly and rightly do very different jobs.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: How worrying is it that, in some schools, black children are still six times more likely to be expelled? Should that be part of the Ofsted assessment?

Sean Harford: It is part of the Ofsted assessment. We would look at the application of the behaviour policy, which would be likely to come through in this case. In the common inspection framework handbook, there was a long list of groups and the data that was put in for those, very heavily segmented. The problem with that was that data works really well at a national level, and it works somewhat at a school level, but when you start dissecting into those groups the numbers become fairly meaningless. You have to go on experiences of youngsters. In a school

where there was such a discrepancy, it would become part of the discussion about why that might be.

That is not to say that it would then directly impact on the grade, because clearly the discussion is the important thing. Certain circumstances lead to certain outcomes.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: Have you seen it impact on the grade, because you have had great concern?

Sean Harford: Absolutely, where there are issues with that kind of thing, we would have reflected that in the grade, because all publicly-funded schools have to meet the public sector equality duty. Therefore, it would be going against the Equality Act 2010 if there was discrimination. Clearly, that would be part of that assessment.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: Six times higher, you would argue, is unacceptable, right?

Sean Harford: Again, it would be part of that discussion. It would depend on numbers and, of course, the situation, but that kind of discrepancy would lead to a very in-depth discussion about that situation.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I have two other questions, but I had better write in, because I am taking other people's spaces.

Sean Harford: We will work on that, thank you.

The Chair: Lord Woolley, we have time if you want to ask any further questions. That is absolutely fine.

Q185 **Lord Woolley of Woodford:** Many thanks. Sean, how does Ofsted ensure that it is effectively inspecting different programmes of study, such as academic GCSEs and A-levels, and technical qualifications, T-levels and apprenticeships? How does its approach differ?

Sean Harford: That comes back to the handbooks I mentioned and the places that we inspect doing different jobs. In further education and skills, we grade and report on different provision types. So 16-to-19 study programmes would include A-levels and T-levels; other apprenticeship provision would be a different provision type, and so forth. We look at those in the context of those particular qualifications. In terms of different schools and how they would approach things, it comes back to the school's ambition and mission for those youngsters.

I am sorry to keep going back to this, but the UTC is probably the one that brings this into sharpest relief, because the approach to the curriculum is quite different from that of a normal, let us say, 11-to-16 school. That is how we go about it, through considering the ambition, the appropriateness of the curriculum and the quality of that curriculum for those young people.

Q186 **Lord Baker of Dorking:** Sean, thank you very much for adjusting your assessments for UTCs, because we do not do EBacc and Progress 8. I am glad to say that my UTCs, as you know, are getting a lot of "good" and "outstanding" ratings. We are very proud of that. Thank you.

Can I say something about the Baker clause? The Baker clause when it

was devised would allow providers, such as apprenticeship providers, FE colleges, UTCs and private providers of training courses, to go in and speak to students aged 13, 14, 15, 16 and 18. When the clause was being devised, I urged the department to make it a statutory duty for schools to arrange the meetings. They refused to do that. They said, “We’ll depend upon ministerial guidance”, and the guidance has been largely ignored and not followed.

We have lots of examples of where we have applied to go in and cannot get in, or where they have offered absurd times, such as late on Friday afternoon or in June and July, when schools are closed, because heads are determined to hang on to every pupil they can. They do not want to lose any to alternative providers.

Today, I am tabling an amendment to the Baker clause, and I will circulate it to colleagues later today, to make it a statutory duty for schools to provide meetings between 1 September and 28 February. They have to do it between those dates, because the school enrolment lists close in March, so meetings in June and July are meaningless. They have to do it in that time. They would have a statutory duty to do it, which means that they must arrange for those meetings.

I hope to get all-party support for that amendment. It might well be carried in the Lords; I just do not know. I do not think the Government will support it, because they say that they are doing consultation. Well, they said that six months ago. It has not started, so consultation will not end until September and it will have no effect on next year at all. If this amendment is carried, meetings could start in schools next January, affecting the recruitment for 2022. I would like to thank you for taking the Baker clause much more seriously in your assessments.

Sean Harford: In response to that, for our part we probably should have been more specific in the inspection handbook and say that it should be reported on, if not met. As I said, the handbook we published yesterday does that, so I hope that will lever some support to this important area.

Where UTC principals see the problems you have just identified, they will not want to be seen as snitches on local schools; I understand that. But if they were to write to us and say that this has happened—“We’re not allowed in. We’re not being given appropriate times. It’s obviously obfuscatory action”—we would take that seriously as part of the complaints about schools process. We could look at that then when we go in and we would have that information from those people. If that carries on and your colleagues, especially in BDT, have those experiences, I would encourage them to do that.

Q187 **Lord Baker of Dorking:** Sean, could I ask you an entirely different question, because you are one of the most experienced people we have had before us who knows such a lot about what happens in schools? Could I ask you a question about climate change? We are trying to grapple with the question of how schools should respond to climate change, because people are telling us that eco-power and climate change will need hundreds of thousands of new jobs over the next five to 10 years, but it does not seem to have penetrated into the education system

in any significant way.

I suppose students at schools can do a bit on climate change in natural science, with the carbon cycle, a bit in biology, a bit in geography and maybe a bit in environmental studies. How, from your wisdom, would you recommend that schools should focus upon it? So many youngsters are passionately interested in climate change. They have revolts about it and everything. The young are worried about it, and it will affect all their lives. Do you have any words of wisdom for us as to how schools should somehow reflect this in their curriculum or what they are going to do?

Sean Harford: With all your Lordships' wisdom, you asking for my wisdom is the pinnacle of my career. You are right. There are a wide number of references in different national curriculum subjects to things like climate change. I came out of teaching myself 18 years ago, but I was a science teacher and regularly taught aspects of climate change, as you mentioned, global warming, greenhouse gases, et cetera. That is not the problem.

In some respects, the question is not whether it is about climate change; it is just about a good environment. If you get cleaner air through doing something, why would you not do it? If you can make city centres cleaner through not having emissions from cars, why would you not do it, even if it did not have an impact on climate change? These are just inherently good things.

Probably one of the answers to this is getting children interested in the technology that will solve this problem. Maybe I am overly optimistic, but I think the technology will have a huge impact on this. Looking at how electric cars have improved so rapidly in the last few years, I think that will have a massive impact. Of course, that is only if it is coupled with green generation of electricity and there are no emissions at the point of use of the car.

The children are interested in the technology for solving it. That is reflected by the fact that they love computers, mobile phones, et cetera. Getting them involved and interested not only in the basic science, the basic geographical issues and the social issues, all of which are really important, but in the technology that can solve these problems is really important.

Lord Baker of Dorking: I welcome that reply. Technology is not in Progress 8 or EBacc. They do not do these technological subjects. Design and technology, as you know, is in severe decline. The school system is not responding. I agree with you: technology is the answer. But this is not yet in our school curriculum. One of the really striking figures we have been sent is that, as of the removal of the GCSE in ICT, 42% fewer students in 11-to-16 schools are now studying computing than five years ago. It is absolutely shattering.

Sean Harford: To give a quick potted history of where things have gone a little awry, a Government back in the day stopped, for example, the need for children at key stage 4 to study a modern foreign language. It was done to try to recognise the fact that a small proportion of students

at that age, mostly disadvantaged boys, could not cope with it. Schools were given the ability to then pull those children out of that. What happened was that half the cohort was taken out, because it is a difficult subject. That is one example.

Design and technology was the second subject I thought of as you were speaking, which long before Progress 8 was put in place, or even the EBacc, became a subject in decline. Why is that? It was taken out of the national curriculum as a compulsory subject at key stage 4, and it is an expensive subject to support in a school. Couple those things and you get the decline that you have just mentioned.

In computing, it is slightly different. In my view, the ICT curriculum we had was poor. At every school I went into, I mainly saw youngsters sitting just using Microsoft Office. They would do Word, PowerPoint and spreadsheets. Realistically, that was not helping computing in this country.

Lord Baker of Dorking: I agree with you.

Sean Harford: With computing, it is different. You line up these subjects that children can just drop, because schools find it difficult. Pupils do not get grades that they think will add to their school scores. This is a problem, and we have seen it in MFL and in D&T. For me, that shows that it is not just one type of subject. It happens wherever you take away these requirements. The national curriculum is inherently a good thing, I have to say. Unfortunately, when you start taking the compulsion out of certain areas of it, schools will respond in a certain way.

Q188 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Mr Harford, what you have just said is incredibly important, because it does not get said nearly often enough. Do you think there is anything specifically that we could recommend to government that might start to adjust the balance? As you yourself said, something has gone awry.

Adjacent to that is another question that I wanted to ask you. I was going to tack it on to my own question a bit later, but I will ask it now. What do you think of the impact of Ofsted's inspection regimes on schools and the way they behave? You will be familiar with the Edge Foundation and the Institute for Education report that was recently published. I will be careful to quote this properly, because I might get it wrong, but it talks, as I remember, about inspections encouraging more compliance than innovation and what they call a pervasive inspection readiness, and the constraints that places on pedagogic and curriculum innovation beyond the inspection framework.

I think these two things are connected. If you do not want to talk too much about it now, perhaps you could write to us, but we would be very interested to hear your views.

Sean Harford: I am in the Chair's hands in terms of time, but I am happy to address those now. The first is about what could be done. We have one of the most permissive education systems in the world. There is very little compulsion in subjects up to age 16, and of course none beyond 16, if youngsters get their English and maths.

As I said earlier, I absolutely believe that the national curriculum was inherently a good thing. It took us forward massively from the Ruskin speech through to when the Conservative Government put it in place—when I first started teaching, actually. My wife had started some years previously. She said that in the first school she was in she had taught the school's curriculum by Easter, and they said, "Teach what you want then". That is where we were.

The national curriculum was a game changer in that way, but if you want to lever change and improvement you need to have control over it. Of course, that is where we do not have control. This is not an Ofsted view. This is my view, I have to say. More compulsory subjects in key stage 4 might be the thing.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Could I interrupt you for one moment? You have not said the word EBacc, and I would like you to put what you have just said into the context of the EBacc, about which views are wide.

Sean Harford: The EBacc is not the reason why the curriculum has been narrowed. If you look at how many subjects there are in the EBacc set and compare them with what schools were doing when I was teaching in the 1990s, youngsters were taking 13, 14 or 15 GCSEs. The number of subjects in the EBacc is half that. Schools may say, "This prevents us teaching things", but it did not prevent them teaching 14 or 15 GCSEs to youngsters in the 1990s, so I do not believe that is the problem.

You could look at what is in the EBacc and consider whether you might put other things in it, but that is a matter for government. We are probably on the wrong side of permissiveness in how much freedom we give within that curriculum that has been set up and has done such a good job over the last 30 years.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I am sorry to keep interrupting you, but I really would love this to be on the record. I know it is your personal view. You are talking about the freedom not to do things as much as or more than the freedom to do things.

Sean Harford: No, it is identifying which are the important things that youngsters should learn, up to a given age.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I expressed myself badly. What you are pointing to as being unhelpful, if I have understood you, is the freedom that schools have not to do things, as opposed to being obliged to do them.

Sean Harford: In certain things, because we took away the requirement, for example, to have D&T in key stage 4, schools responded in a way that has been unhelpful for pushing forward technology in this country. I think the same about modern foreign languages. I could see why that Government tried to do it for a small number of children, but the schools responded in a way that did not affect only a small number of children. You had a second part of your question there.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Yes, I am sorry.; I can see that there are lots of hands up. It was just about the way the inspection framework

affects schools' behaviour.

Sean Harford: I have one sentence back on that. In our previous framework, when we had a single judgment, which was about outcomes and was not wholly but largely based on test and exam results, I can see why schools would respond in a certain way. With the new framework, we have tried to break that open and get schools to think about the substance of what they are teaching youngsters, and not just what the points score on the doors will be at the end of that key stage for them. In doing that, we can encourage better behaviour from schools.

Lord Storey: We could have a long discussion about this. If you look at creative and technical subjects in secondary school, because they are not part of the EBacc requirement you see school governing bodies or school heads unloading some of those subjects because they do not think they are important to the overall status of the school. Take the creative sector, which is hugely important to the economy of the country. We are seeing a massive decline in individual creative subjects. When you try to dig further down, one of the reasons you find for that decline is the EBacc.

Sean Harford: We need to be careful about what we mean by creative and technical. To me, creativity has many, many forms. It is not something we teach as a subject. It comes through in many subjects. Mathematicians and engineers are incredibly creative, so we need to be careful. I know what you mean, though. You are probably thinking of the arts, because of the £111 billion that contributes to the economy each year. I understand what that means.

Going back to my earlier answer, I do not think this is a problem with the EBacc. Schools can provide the kinds of curriculum that go beyond the EBacc, and they did when they could accumulate point scores from GNVQs and GCSEs in the 1990s and early 2000s. They found ways of teaching it. I am not sure it can all be landed at the feet of the EBacc.

Of course, where Governments have recognised that this might be an issue, they have made adjustments to the requirements. UTCs, for example, can now put a curriculum in place that does not have to have the EBacc in it, but it is very unlikely not to be teaching maths, English and two or three sciences, so really it has most of it in it anyway. We need to be careful about landing all the problems at the feet of the EBacc. I do not believe that is the case.

Lord Baker of Dorking: As you know, when I introduced the national curriculum, I tried to make it as broad as possible, with 14 or 15 GCSEs, so schools could choose. Actually, it is now becoming much narrower. The drop of 20% or 25% in cultural subjects, such as dance, drama and music, is there to be measured, as is the drop of 70% in design and technology, an expensive subject, since 2010. Very little technical is done now in 11-to-16 schools up to GCSE. As a result, Pearson has detailed the enormous drop in technical qualifications since 2010. I know some of them were rubbishy qualifications; I accept that entirely, but many were not.

Therefore, technical education is being drained out, quite frankly. I accept

that there has to be a basic core of education. Rab Butler referred to it very well as the common mill of education. That is English, maths and science, in my view. That is it. We do that at UTCs, definitely. Beyond that, much wider choice should be available to teachers to encourage them to do interesting things.

I agree that creativity is in other subjects as well, but I have never thought it necessary for disadvantaged children, a third of the children in the country, to learn a second, foreign language compulsorily, when many of them do not know English as their first language. It is an absurdity, quite frankly. I was very much in favour when that was dropped out. I think it should be dropped out again. On the other hand, secondary schools keep them in because it is a way to universities.

Sean Harford: We need to be careful about disadvantaged children, because the children who find it really difficult to do MFL are low-attainment children, not necessarily disadvantaged children. There are more non-disadvantaged children in that low-attainment group in number than there are disadvantaged children. By cutting it in different ways, you need to be really careful about the conclusions you draw from that. I would hate to see a presumption that, if you are from a disadvantaged background, you should not be learning a foreign language.

We need to be really sharp about how we assess who might do them. As I said, the original Government, when they lifted the restriction, were trying to lift it from youngsters who were having terrible trouble with English, let alone an additional language. That was not where schools went with it, and that is where we lost those huge numbers of children doing a language. There will have been lots and lots of disadvantaged children who were perfectly capable of doing it but dropped it. The cultural capital that they have missed from that has been enormous over the years.

Q189 **Lord Empey:** Good morning. I wanted to move on to T-levels. So far, what has your office learned from its thematic survey of the implementation of T-levels, and what are the main successes and challenges that you have so far identified?

Sean Harford: Unfortunately, because of Covid and the pandemic, the T-level survey has been postponed until December this year. That is because it was a fairly slow start anyway. A couple of thousand students across the country were going to or did start it in September 2020. The problem that colleges had was getting industrial placements for the students during the pandemic. It has been a very slow start for them, for understandable reasons, so we are postponing the start of our survey to look at it.

I am leaving Ofsted at the end of August, but I will be really interested to see what happens through T-levels, because there is much potential there, but they need to be implemented really well. We have seen a number of such qualifications in the past that have not been implemented well and the youngsters have been the losers. If we can get this right, that would be fantastic. We will be starting that survey this coming December.

Q190 Lord Empey: Following on from your very pertinent point about doing them well, is it not the case that some universities have already said that they will not take them into account when people apply to them? Does that not devalue the whole process from the very start?

Sean Harford: You are right; some have. We have a very autonomous HE sector in this country, so they are at liberty to do so. It would be a great shame, especially as we have just started to inspect level 6 and 7 apprenticeships being carried out in universities. It is a really important part of the offer. If universities were to do that, it would be a great shame.

This is really interesting, because people often go to the parity of esteem between academic and technical, vocational subjects and pathways. Germany is often held up as a shining light in especially technical education for youngsters. When their families are asked, "Would you prefer you child to go through a technical, vocational route or an academic route?" even in a place like Germany they all say academic. There is something in all this that needs to be broken down.

This is a personal view, but I think universities have done pretty poorly by our students during Covid. They have carried on charging them full fees for what has effectively been an online course that they would have provided face to face, and they have not really recognised that. That has been bad. I know they have been in difficult circumstances, I understand that, but going back to face to face seems to have taken an awfully long time and it is still not a given for next year's students.

The pandemic may open youngsters' eyes to whether it is better for them at age 18, having a good stock of qualifications behind them, potentially including T-levels in future, to do great things in apprenticeships. That is something that Germany shows us: that we need to think about the route through apprenticeships to higher qualifications, including doctorates in engineering and what have you, very carefully.

Lord Empey: Parity of esteem has come up as an issue time and again during this inquiry. We have also heard many times that parents are huge influencers of students. How would you suggest that T-levels are done well so that universities simply cannot point the finger at them and say, "These are something of a lesser breed"? We will never break the cycle unless the qualifications are of a coherent and significant standard that is widely recognised by employers and the public alike.

Sean Harford: Yes, you are right. When we carry out our inspections, if a provider puts on T-levels it will be part of the 16-to-19 study programme, which will be alongside many providers' A-level offer. In fact, the standards that we apply to the quality of education, including A-levels, will be applied to T-levels. We will certainly be doing our part in making sure that they are up to scratch and are the quality qualification they need to be for people to take them seriously. If we do that and we report publicly, we have an important part to play in that.

Q191 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Mr Harford, you touched earlier on the question of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. I wanted to ask

you two questions, which are connected. One is how Ofsted factors in the particular challenges for schools that have a large intake of pupils with particular social and economic disadvantages. That is one kind of disadvantage. How do you weight the impact that schools have on the lives of those young people? A related but separate question is how schools accommodate young people with special educational needs and how Ofsted evaluates the provision that is being made for them.

Sean Harford: Clearly, a high number of schools are in areas of disadvantage. We cannot have a lower acceptable standard for those schools compared with schools in other parts of the country. That will do nobody any good, especially not those children. We have the same standard for the quality of education across the country, whether in Surrey or Newcastle. Part of my job is to ensure that consistency of approach across the country in all our inspections. That is a red line for us, because those parents and children deserve the same as other parents and children.

In recognising that it is a tougher job in disadvantaged areas, we can reflect that in our judgement of the leadership and management of that school. At the point at which we inspect, that leadership and management may not have led to high enough standards in educational outcomes terms for those youngsters. But if we can recognise that they are doing the right things to achieve that, and we can identify that they are focused on the right things for that particular school in its circumstances, we will grade them more highly.

For example, in our “requires improvement” judgment, there are about 13% of all schools in that grade. A quarter of those, although they require improvement overall, are judged to have good leadership and management. That is saying, “Look, if you put your leadership and management in an easier area, you’d have the overall effectiveness of a good school. At the moment, you’re focusing on the right things and doing the right things for those youngsters. It will take some time, and that’s why overall the school requires improvement, but we think you are going to get there and you have good capacity to improve”. That is how we square that circle.

SEND children are referred to as a specific group in our handbook, and you have to be providing decent education for that group of children to be judged as good. Indeed, you have to be providing very good/exceptional education for them to be judged as outstanding. It is highly unlikely, if you did not have outstanding education for those pupils, that you would be judged as outstanding. They are a specific focus for us, not only at an individual school level but in our area SEND inspections, in which we look at the partnership between health, education, the providers and the local authority in order to make sure that the systems are doing the right thing by those youngsters.

I have to say that about half of those that we have inspected since 2016 have come out on the wrong side of that judgement in area SEND provision. Often it is in health and lack of partnership with local authorities. We are developing a new framework to focus much more

closely going forward on the experience of the child. Our original framework was set up really to look at whether areas were meeting the new code of practice that was put in place in 2014.

Q192 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: You have put your finger on a very significant issue as far as SEND children are concerned, in that there are other agencies whose influence is critical to the educational outcomes for those young people. Can I take you back to the issue about populations that are deprived or disadvantaged? Can you say a word about teacher recruitment and retention in those areas? How do you recognise the difficulties that schools have in areas where there are significant difficulties and challenges in recruiting and then retaining really good teachers?

Sean Harford: This is really tough for schools, especially those in forgotten coastal areas, where they cannot get teachers to move there. We need to remember that the majority of teachers are married with children, and they will be thinking about what their children will get when they move to a certain area. That is the difficulty. I go back to the fact that we are not in the business of saying, "There, there, it's so tough for you. Let's give you a 'good' when you're not good" to encourage teachers to go there. That is not what our business should be.

In terms of our focus now, we have a new teacher training framework, which just started this term. We have been asked by the DfE to inspect the early careers framework, and the providers of training and development for early career teachers and, indeed, for established teachers and leaders who are training in national professional qualifications. We will be inspecting those from next year as well.

The Government have done a good job in getting a line of sight between training, making sure you have great teachers, developing them and developing them further into their career to make it a more attractive profession, alongside measures, such as Teach First, to encourage younger teachers into areas where they would not necessarily go. But there really is no magic wand here. It is tough.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: You might argue that the better qualified and better prepared the teacher or school leader, the more likely they are to get jobs in areas that everybody wants jobs in, and the less likely they are to be drawn to the less advantaged ones, but that is merely my observation. Could you suggest to us anything you think we could recommend by way of incentive, beyond what you have just described, that might encourage not just newly qualified teachers but experienced school leaders to take on more readily the challenges you have just described?

Sean Harford: We need to be careful. Lots of teachers will go to areas of difficulty, because that is what they love to do. They love to help children who are in those areas. We need not think that they just never go there. As for whether money incentives, or key worker incentives, would help, so that they could afford housing and what have you, they might. As I said, there are no magic wands here, but making teaching a really attractive profession so that people clamour to get into it will inevitably

lead to more supply and therefore sate demand in such places as the coastal areas I have mentioned.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: That is very interesting, thank you.

Q193 **Lord Layard:** I wanted to ask about the teaching of life skills, which has now been made compulsory under the name "relationships, sex and health education". This is very important for the development of adolescents and young adults. What is your assessment of how this subject has been taught up to now? What is your assessment of the extent and quality of the teacher training, the use of evidence-based approaches for handling such a difficult subject, and the amount of time devoted to it over the school year? What is your assessment of the past teaching of this? How do you think, now that it has been made compulsory, this should change? How would that affect Ofsted's evaluation of the school's performance in this respect?

Q194 **Lord Woolley of Woodford:** I too have a question. I think that teachers who are teaching in more disadvantaged areas should be paid more. It is more challenging. It seems to be a no-brainer. I am reflecting on my own education, some 50-odd years ago, and what I have seen as an absurdity: that life chances were immeasurably enhanced if you passed the 11-plus. Fast forward some 50 years later and we are still at that fork in the road. It has probably got worse in regard to class. It still feels profoundly wrong, profoundly absurd, that life chances are enhanced or disadvantaged at such an early age.

Sean Harford: Picking up the first question on relationships, sex and health education, I will refer to the sexual abuse review that we carried out recently in response to a commission from the Secretary of State for Education, which was again in response to the Everyone's Invited website, where many young women put citations about their sexual abuse by their peers, mostly boys. What the young women predominantly told us was that the RSE—relationship and sex education, more likely called PHSE—that they got was not teaching them the right things or going to the right subjects. As a result, one young girl said to our inspectors, "It shouldn't be up to us girls to teach the boys what is right and wrong".

Based on the powerful voice of those young people, there is an area of RSHE that has not been done well and has not been picked up. We identified where we can do better in this area in inspection. To be fair to the Government, they have been developing the RSHE requirements for some time, as Lord Layard identified. That comes in as a compulsory element from September for schools, and we are looking forward to inspecting that as part of our assessment.

In the past, it was probably as strong as the school itself. Where we have seen it go wrong sometimes is where teachers did not feel comfortable approaching certain topics. This again came out in the sexual abuse review. They did not feel that they had been given the training to deal with certain issues with youngsters. That is a great shame, because often the teacher will be one of those trusted adults in the youngsters' lives and therefore well placed to do this.

There has been a misconception that, because you can teach maths, for example, you can teach youngsters about sexual abuse, peer-on-peer abuse and all the other things that go with RSHE. That has probably been a bit of a mistake, frankly. Maybe we need to look to more dedicated RSHE teachers who do this as a subject, especially in secondary, as a major part of their training, just as they would be trained to teach maths, science, French or what have you. Maybe that needs to be done.

To Lord Layard's question about the quality of PHSE, we have seen in the past that it is generally done less well when schools rely on what they call drop-down days and do not have it as a normal part of their curriculum. They might put one day aside every term or every couple of terms just to look at specific PSHE issues. It tends to be done in a perfunctory way. It is difficult to plan the sequencing in the curriculum. Things get left off or are bolted on just to try to make up for things. That is where we have seen the quality denuded in the past. I hope that is okay for Lord Layard as an answer.

To Lord Woolley's question about life chances, it is 11.30 am. We could be here until 5 pm discussing this one. On the 11-plus, I do not really want to get drawn on the differences between grammar schools, secondary moderns and what we used to call comprehensive, which we now call foundation and community schools. It is less about that kind of thing and more about the absolute quality of education that schools can provide for youngsters, regardless of what happened to them at the age of 11. I have seen schools in areas where there is selection, where the children have not necessarily passed the 11-plus, give an absolutely fabulous education. I have seen grammar schools that give a fabulous education.

It comes down to the quality of leadership and management, the quality of the teaching and the curriculum, and the thoughtfulness that goes into that for those children. It is not necessarily a structural thing. It comes down to people, and education is a people business. If you get the relationships and everything else right around the curriculum et cetera, you will succeed with youngsters regardless.

Lord Woolley, you are right. Why do we still have such disadvantage? Why is it that even children who succeed in education, particularly from minority ethnic groups, do not succeed in the workplace? This is a wider issue. Schools cannot fix all those issues. We need to fix them as a society.

The Chair: Sean, can I thank you very much indeed for giving evidence to the committee this morning? It has been extremely helpful, and I am particularly grateful for your personal observations, as opposed to the more formal observations, of Ofsted policy. I understand that you are the outgoing, as it is described to us, national director for education for Ofsted, so on behalf of the committee, in thanking you for your evidence this morning, I wish you all the very best for the future.