



Youth Unemployment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Youth unemployment

Tuesday 29 June 2021

11.40 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. 19

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 195 - 207

Witnesses

I: Dr Jason Arday, Trustee, Runnymede Trust; Dr Gurleen Popli, Senior Economics Lecturer, University of Sheffield.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witnesses

Dr Gurleen Popli and Dr Jason Arday.

Q195 **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. On behalf of the committee, I extend a very warm welcome to Dr Jason Arday and Dr Gurleen Popli. I am going to introduce them very briefly just to introduce themselves to the committee.

Dr Jason Arday: Good morning, everyone. I hope you are all keeping well. I am an associate professor of sociology in the Department of Sociology and the deputy executive dean for people and culture in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Health at Durham University. It is an absolute privilege to be here. I am really looking forward to engaging in this process.

Dr Gurleen Popli: Good morning, everyone. Thanks a lot for having me here. I am a senior lecturer in the Department of Economics at the University of Sheffield. My broad areas of research are in education and labour economics, specifically looking at how childhood poverty impacts children and examining the school-to-work transition of young people. Currently, I have a Leverhulme Trust research fellowship specifically to look at the school-to-work transition of ethnic minority young people.

The Chair: I want to address a question to Dr Popli first. Dr Arday, perhaps you might want to come in in a moment. What long-term structural inequalities are faced by young people from ethnic minority backgrounds in terms of employment and economic inactivity? I wonder whether you could describe those to us. This morning, we have learned of a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies that addresses some of the issues contained within this question. I might also have a supplementary question for you.

Dr Gurleen Popli: When we are looking at the reasons why young people face higher unemployment, across all ethnicities, social disadvantage stands out. We can look at the factors that particularly impact ethnic minorities more from both the supply side and the demand side. From the supply side, looking at the individual characteristics, we know that, on average, ethnic minorities do very well in education. Their GCSE scores have been much better than for white young people.

However, there are gaps within this average success. For example, those low-achieving ethnic minority children from disadvantaged backgrounds who cannot go on into formal education tend not to go towards vocational education. When they come to the labour market there is a training gap, which makes them more prone to be unemployed. For those who go on to further education, we find that although they do better at GCSEs, they do not necessarily do well at A-level, at least not across all ethnic minorities. Certain ethnic minorities do not do that well at A-level, which

then means there is a qualification gap for them when they go on to employment.

Ethnic minorities tend to go to higher education more than their white peers. However, the representation of ethnic minorities at the selective universities is less. Even with the same A-level scores, they are less likely to go to Russell group universities. Their degrees are viewed as lower quality in the labour market, so there is a quality gap there.

Given the educational success, there are a number of factors behind it that need to be looked at. This educational success on average sounds good, but there are a lot of gaps in it. There are training, quality and qualification gaps.

The fourth factor, which the IFS report that came out this morning makes a very strong point about, is the intergenerational persistence of gaps. If you look at social disadvantage and compare the whites and ethnic minorities, even given the social disadvantage ethnic minorities tend to do better than their white peers in education. This does not translate into labour market success for them.

There is social mobility among the young. The IFS report is quoting numbers and showing that although there is more social mobility among ethnic minority young people than for their white peers, once you control for the disadvantaged background it does not match with their educational success. They have educational success, but that is not being translated into the labour market. There is something going on there that we still do not fully understand.

That comes to the point I was going to make about the demand-side factors. There are a couple of things that happen. The way that young people from ethnic minorities do a job search could explain why they are not able to transition successfully to the labour market. Evidence suggests that the young people quite often pick up their first jobs from their parental social network. Because a larger proportion of ethnic minorities come from disadvantaged backgrounds, their parents usually do not have those networks to provide them with that first entry. They lack that. Also, a minor part of the issue is that they tend to be less regionally mobile. They tend to move less to where the jobs are.

On the demand side, one thing that the IFS report also hints at, which we have evidence of from field experiments, is that ethnic minorities definitely face hiring discrimination. That is a part of the story that we cannot ignore. The DWP funded a field experiment in 2008 and 2009, where identical CVs of young people in their 20s to early 30s were sent out to employers. It found a 29% disadvantage on the part of the ethnic minorities. A successful outcome is where a CV is sent and you are called for an interview. White young people had to send out nine such applications to get a successful outcome, whereas ethnic minorities had to send 16. This is to be interviewed; we do not even know whether they will be hired after that.

Horizon 2020 funded further field experiments in 2016 and 2017, which found similar results. They were not focused on young people; they were

across all working-age adults, from 16 to 64. It found that that level of hiring discrimination still exists. That is a big part of it. Today's IFS report is stressing the intergenerational component of it.

The Chair: Do the inequalities that you have described differ from those faced by young white people from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds? In other words, what comparison with disadvantaged young white people might we find?

Dr Gurleen Popli: Every inequality I mentioned is in comparison to equivalent white young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Each and every one is in relation to young peers of the same background. When you look at training two people from the same social background, white young people are more willing to go specifically for advanced apprenticeship programmes, which obviously have returns in the labour market. Ethnic minorities do not go for them that often. Each and every one inequality is over and above the social disadvantage.

Dr Jason Arday: Dr Popli raises some hugely pertinent points. It is safe to assert that it is probably quite a challenging time to be young. To complement the things Dr Popli has said, some things that were really problematic in terms of the precarious positions that young people find themselves in transiting from the youth to the labour market pre-Covid, so even before we were talking about Covid, were long-term wage stagnation, rising youth unemployment and rising youth poverty aligned very much to the gig economy. There is insecurity in terms of the impossibility now of home ownership.

One thing that has been really pertinent as well is that, over the past five to 10 years, in some ways we have had a collapsing labour market. That has aligned with being in and coming out of austerity. In some ways, the pandemic has reflected a mirror to those kinds of inequalities. Some 88% of people who lost jobs last year were under the age of 35, according to the Office for National Statistics.

When we think about the kinds of comparisons and drawing this more specifically within the black and minority ethnic diaspora, comparatively, in the last 12 months BAME unemployment has risen from 5.8% to 9.5%. This disparity is really being shown, with 34% of black and ethnic minority people having their hours reduced and 25% of black and ethnic minority people applying for universal credit, with nearly one in five using food banks. Black and ethnic minority unemployment is accelerating three times faster than in comparison to their white counterparts.

It is also important to acknowledge that that is not to make it adversarial or suppress the problems that white people face with regards to unemployment. It is to recognise that structures such as institutional racism and systemic racism impact and compound the experiences that black and ethnic minority people will face going into the labour market. This is also compounded when we think of graduates, particularly black graduates, who are still four times more likely to be unemployed than white male graduates.

Q196 **The Lord Bishop of Derby:** Good morning, both. We are very glad to

have you with us. Thank you so much for really helpfully outlining for us the ways you have been able to show how young people from ethnic minority backgrounds face the disadvantages you have described in the labour market, in terms of greater likelihood of unemployment, greater pay inequality and greater propensity to be on unstable contracts. I want to ask you whether there are remedies that you might want to imagine or propose, or that you might dream of, that might help us to get underneath the data and context that you have presented really helpfully. What next? What might shift this? What might you hope might be remedies for what you have described?

Dr Jason Arday: That is a good question. On remedies, one of the things that is important is, in many respects, having solutions as a society, generally speaking. There is almost a stagnation, and that has been wrapped up in an identity politics that has become quite adversarial. One of the most important things that we need to think about is how we invest in our education system in terms of the life course.

More importantly, it is about the creation of opportunities. There is a dearth of opportunities for young people. As a result of that kind of chasm, young people have become more entrepreneurial and innovative in what they do, but there has been an overreliance on that. The suggestion I would make is that we need to, if possible, try to keep people in education longer. I make that argument because I still believe that an education is the best way to become more socially mobile.

We need to have a Government who invest more in internships and graduate opportunities. Ten years ago there seemed to be a lot more graduate opportunities and graduate professions for entering the labour market, where young people were given the opportunity to cut their teeth and learn. Those opportunities are probably non-existent, which has meant that we have a lot of young graduates going into positions that, in many respects, are not aligned to what they studied or what their career ambitions were.

A lot of it is making sure that we are creating opportunity and that it is aligned to degree professions. One of the best ways of doing this is that more university courses need to have sandwich degrees. In other words, a traditional degree programme is three years and some degree programmes have gone to four years and have that industry year. We need to have that embedded more in our higher education system.

On apprenticeships, as was mentioned by the fantastic speaker earlier, we need to invest and encourage more 18 year-olds to consider that as an option. There needs to be a groundswell of investment to mobilise that.

For me, the essence is thinking about the types of opportunity we can provide young people. It would be good, if possible, to provide monetary opportunities with loans that potentially have a lower interest rate to encourage young people to start up businesses. I have always thought that it would be interesting to explore what would happen if every young person leaving university was given £5,000 to £10,000 as a seed fund to start up a business.

Although there has been an overreliance on young people's ability to be entrepreneurial, we can capitalise on that entrepreneurship and that kind of philanthropy in a good way that we may not have been able to historically. It is important that we give young people the opportunities to thrive. Where we are not able to do that, we need to think about the barriers that prohibit people from working class and particular race backgrounds going into the labour market.

The Lord Bishop of Derby: On that, are there particular interventions or aspects that we need to be alert to for those from minority ethnic backgrounds as they enter employment? That is through whichever route, either getting into longer-term education, as you have described, through the degree route or other routes that may be better suited for them and for our futures. Are there particular things that we could put in place for those from minority ethnic backgrounds, either across the board or for particular ethnicities?

Dr Jason Arday: There should be targeted partnership programme opportunities to address employment inequalities, particularly for black and ethnic minority people. As important to that is mentorship, guidance and coaching. I feel that we need to make best use of positive action. I know that people are sometimes resistant to affirmative action, but I do not think we make as good use of positive action as we could do in the UK. If we made better use of it we could have targeted interventions for black and ethnic minority people that recognise the disadvantage they face in respect to a structurally racist society. Coaching and mentorship around that, investing in it and developing that infrastructure would be really pertinent.

The Lord Bishop of Derby: Dr Popli, are there things that you want to contribute to this bit of the conversation as well?

Dr Gurleen Popli: I have a couple of minor points to add on to what Dr Arday said. Not everybody wants to go down the formal route, and further education and vocational training in general tend to be not very well signposted or funded. For whatever reason, ethnic minorities tend to opt for it less. If there could be a way to encourage them to go down that route, that would be really helpful.

There is also one thing I mentioned earlier that adds to these intergenerational problems. Young people rely on their networks for their first jobs. Ethnic minority young people do not have those. Their parents do not have networks that can provide them with a good start. If there could be a formal network, linking them up to employers where they might be able to go, that would be very important.

The third thing is what came out from the DWP study and the Horizon 2020 study. When people apply for jobs, if their identity is kept separate from the qualifications fit for the job, as quite often happens in the public sector, the hiring discrimination almost disappears. It was found that there was very little hiring discrimination in public sector jobs. That is partly because the CVs are written in a way on an application form where personal details are kept away. Incentivising more people to hire in that

way, even in the private sector, would be a positive step to address the issues of discrimination that exist already.

Q197 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I am struggling to untangle things that we need to pull apart a bit. There is the issue about careers, aspiration, education and mobility, which both of you referenced. Then there is obviously a connected but separate issue of work. There are lots of jobs. I was interested in what you said, Dr Arday, about the jobs market having collapsed at a certain point. You might want to expand on that a little, because certainly the conventional wisdom is that the job market was expanding before the pandemic. Of course, it was expanding in areas where the jobs were, on the whole, low status and low value.

What I am trying to get at is that young people from different ethnic minority groups are overrepresented in low-status, low-value jobs, but they are in work. What are we trying to get at here? Are we trying to get at a general exclusion from the labour market, or an exclusion from sectors of the labour market that are higher status and higher value?

Dr Gurleen Popli: These are two very different things. You are absolutely right. One is about getting into work and the other is about what kind of work. There are two different issues. I was more addressing getting into work, and there are significant gaps there. Despite their higher education, they are not able to get the jobs. I know that it has become a buzzword: "Ethnic minorities are doing so well in GCSEs, so there is nothing wrong here". GCSEs do not get you jobs. They are a starting point. They are a must, but they do not translate into jobs.

What translates into jobs is, "Have you done training?" No, ethnic minorities have not done it because they do not opt for it. How are their A-levels? Their A-levels are not that good. Are they getting into universities and degree programmes, which the labour market rewards as higher quality? That is where we are seriously lacking. They are far less likely to go into top-end universities, so they are not going to get into jobs. That is one aspect of it.

Because they are not able to get jobs even with their educational success, they end up taking jobs for which they are overqualified. They are then stuck in low-level jobs. That follows on from not being able to find a job to begin with.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: That is really helpful. Before Dr Arday adds to that, which I am sure he will want to, I am still struggling with this issue about who is going to do the jobs that need doing, the jobs that we do not regard as significant in terms of status and are not well paid. We saw this during the pandemic, did we not? We suddenly started talking about people working in retail and supermarkets as tremendously important because they were keeping a system going. Actually, those jobs are low status and low pay, in the main. It is the same with social care. What do we have to say about those jobs, in the context of thinking about inclusivity in the labour market?

Dr Gurleen Popli: If anything, the pandemic has shown us that those jobs are critical for the economy and maybe we should be paying them better to do those jobs. I hope that would solve some issues.

Dr Jason Arday: You raise some fantastic points. One thing I would mention is that, yes, you are absolutely right to highlight that there is an importance to those jobs. If we effectively have, in many respects, this tiered system of what jobs are important and what jobs are not, that is going to be problematic and detrimental to jobs that we have recognised in the last 14 months are hugely important to maintaining the economy and our financial infrastructure.

The issue for me lies with, as Dr Popli has said, black and ethnic minorities being overpopulated in jobs that they are overqualified for. That is the issue. Although I do not endorse that as a means to be hyper-selective about the types of jobs one may choose, I endorse that if people have engaged in a process of studying, upskilling and learning required skills to be able to undertake certain opportunities and jobs, then everybody should be provided with the same opportunity and access to those jobs.

Presently, we have observed that people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, despite having those prerequisite skills, are not being given the access and opportunities to undertake those jobs in the labour market. That is problematic because, when we strip everything away, it speaks to something slightly more sinister that potentially aligns to institutional or structural racism. It would be interesting to hear your thoughts. That is where I would see the crux point.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: We are not here to hear my views. I do not mean that disrespectfully, by the way, I simply mean that we are here to hear yours. What you have described, unfortunately, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If young people from ethnic minority communities find it difficult to get anything except low-status jobs they will not then progress, so the association of low-status jobs with an ethnic minority workforce gets embedded. That is where it feels to me that we also have a problem, in addition to the very specific things you identified. That properly worries me.

Dr Jason Arday: I totally agree. There probably also needs to be a societal disruption of those narratives, which also needs to come within black and ethnic minority groups. One of the things that is often said about black and ethnic minority people, particularly when they leave education and go into the labour market, is that that particular group of individuals lacks ambition. That is something that is commonly said: that they are not as ambitious. It is important that we arrest that as a dominant discourse, because it is wholly inaccurate.

The most important thing, as the Lord Bishop mentioned or alluded to earlier, is thinking about solutions and how we can go about them. My wish would be for all people at the lower end of the social strata in society—black and ethnic minority people and white working class people—to be socially mobile and to engage in a process of education,

have positive outcomes from that and not have their background suspend or prohibit their life chances of being successful in the labour market.

Q198 Lord Hall of Birkenhead: This is a question for Dr Arday, but you both might want to chip in. One of the solutions you mentioned about five or six minutes ago was mentoring and coaching. This has come up from all sorts of different sources, as you could imagine. Could you describe what you think good might look like there, in terms of the sort of mentoring that you think might be a good solution, by whom, in what way and over what period? You clearly have a very thought-through idea of what that should be.

Dr Jason Arday: Thank you so much for your question. I used to work and live in Liverpool, so there is a personal affiliation there. It is about drawing on role models. I know that sounds like an obvious thing to say, but it is about how we can build a national databank of successful black and minority ethnic people who have traversed the labour market and got to the top of their organisations, whether it be in the private, public or voluntary sectors. It would be interesting to collate that expertise and for people to have access to those resources.

What would work really well is for organisations to have access to that particular databank and be able to draw on it, whether in a consultancy or advisory capacity, to help support young black and ethnic minority people and people from white working class backgrounds to think about what types of navigational instruments or tools they will need to traverse, in many respects, a socially inequitable system. What will they need to be able to do that?

That absence of coaching and social capital is one of the reasons why a lot of people from economically deprived backgrounds struggle. There is not that navigational point to know what to do in that situation. It cannot be overestimated how powerful it is to have somebody who has traversed the same path you have done and been successful. It would be good to have a resource bank or data pool of people who have been able to do that. There are some hugely successful people in society that we could draw into that.

Fundamentally, that needs to be resourced. Government would probably be the first place I would think of to do that, logically speaking. There are also people who are absolutely champing at the bit to provide all that expertise and experience to help nurture and nourish the next generation. It would be amazing to see that really come to fruition. I believe it could if we had a more structured form of mentoring that was nationally recognised. At the moment, we have a lot of mentoring in informal capacities. Because it differs its effectiveness is sometimes quite hard to measure in the informal structure it currently resides in.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: Thank you very much. That is a really interesting and good idea.

Q199 Lord Clarke of Nottingham: For what it is worth, I strongly agree with your analysis. The problem for white working class children in deprived areas, as well as ethnic minority children, is the low levels of parental

expectation, experience, contact in the labour market and so on, particularly if you have a difficult family background with several generations largely unemployed and so on. They expect that the child will just go to school, leave school and have no aspirations beyond that.

One way of addressing that would be for the school or college to start widening the horizons, raising the aspirations and providing the contacts for such pupils, which is why I am rather going on about career guidance this morning. It is not my only interest in this subject, but it is absolutely clear. We have only started developing it in the last 10 years or so. Do either of you have any views about the type of career guidance we are giving at the moment and how career guidance can be made more effective in addressing this problem? Somehow, the gap left by lack of parental expectations or even knowledge of career possibilities has to be filled by some trusted person at the school, it seems to me. Do you think we are making any progress on that front? Do you have any particular ideas about how we should go about it?

Dr Gurleen Popli: Can I clarify one thing first? You said that, for most of the young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, lack of aspirations and parental expectations is an issue. I disagree with that. In fact, what we find is that, among ethnic minorities, parental expectations and young pupils' own aspirations are the reason why they are succeeding, despite being from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: Does that not differ between cultural groups? People from Chinese or Indian backgrounds do quite spectacularly better than people from white, Bangladeshi or Pakistani backgrounds. That is a cultural thing. As we become a more integrated society, one trusts that that will all begin to vanish. Meanwhile, there are certainly significant numbers of these families, of all ethnicities, where there is very low parental expectation: there is parental pressure to leave school as soon as possible and no parental knowledge of the labour markets or contacts of any great use if the child actually has some innate ability, either academic or technical.

Dr Gurleen Popli: I will have to disagree there with you, and I apologise for that. Yes, young people from Chinese and Indian backgrounds do better in educational outcomes and there they are above their white peers and other ethnic minorities. When it comes to parental aspiration and expectations, they are much higher for all ethnic minorities across the board than among their white peers.

I do not think the problem is aspirations and expectations among these ethnic minorities. The problem, which you yourself hinted at correctly, is that we are not able to channel it correctly for all ethnic minorities. They may not know what to do but they definitely want their children to continue in education. There is data from cohort studies, from the 1980s and the 1990 cohort of LSYPE to the latest cohort of the Millennium Cohort Study of the 2000s. Parental aspirations and expectations for young people are higher in ethnic minorities, across all ethnic minorities. Translating them into action that is an issue. You are right: that comes back to the problem that their parents do not have the networks needed

to channel them. Schools play a role in it. Jobcentres probably play a role in it.

Dr Arday's point on mentorship and having a national database is brilliant. The Government should try to do that. One of the things they will discover when they start building this national database is that they will not find very many successful role models. This goes all the way through. To begin with, that database will be small and that will have to be addressed. Once these people get into jobs, the promotions are not there for them to reach that point where they can be put into that national database. That itself will highlight problems that we are not discussing today but that are related.

Lord Clarke of Nottingham: That is an interesting analysis. We are both talking about a similar point, but you are clarifying the actual nature of it.

Q200 Lord Woolley of Woodford: This is a wonderful conversation. You are giving us great insight, which is often granular and nuanced. Thank you very much for that. I want to first talk about what may be the elephant in the room. We have been talking about opportunities and where we channel our efforts. I want to know from the two doctors how helpful—or unhelpful, I would probably say—it is that there is a raging debate out there that seems to be pitting tackling race inequality against the challenges of white working class children. I perceived that last week in the Education Select Committee report and I was a little disappointed, because I have great respect for Robert Halfon. How unhelpful do you think this is when a committee like ours is wrestling so passionately, with such energy, to tackle these moving parts?

You have highlighted with great clarity and laid bare discriminatory factors. I am very much aware of Dr Anthony Heath's report in 2019, when he sent out identical applications but changed the name. There was a 60% disadvantage to those with foreign-sounding names. Racial disadvantage cannot be disputed. How unhelpful do you think this cul-de-sac debate that seems to pit tackling one against another is?

Dr Gurleen Popli: It is very unhelpful. When we point out that there are disadvantages to ethnic minority children and young people, my starting point was and remains that the overriding disadvantage is social background. That applies both to white young people and ethnic minority young people. Ethnic minority young people face challenges over and above that, but assuming that these two things are separate is not going to be helpful to anyone.

White young people from working class backgrounds are disadvantaged, yes, but so are ethnic minority people from working class backgrounds. If we address that, we address problems in both things. It is very unhelpful, because we are talking about the same things. We are not talking about different things.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: But are we talking about the same things? One is class, which you clearly highlight. Another dynamic, and a cumulative disadvantage, is this discriminatory element, in which a white

person's CV and a black person's CV are judged differently. It is the same and more, no?

Dr Gurleen Popli: It is the same and more. That is what I am addressing. It is more, but there are similar elements. When we try to address the disadvantage that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds face, there are things that we have to do at the class level. They are more likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds than their white peers. We need to address that. Then, of course, there are issues that are institutional in nature that we need to address. It is same and more, but pitting one against the other is not solving anyone's problems.

Dr Jason Arday: Lord Woolley, it is good to see you again, my dear friend. Fundamentally, the rearguard action taken in the very rare instances in British political history where racism goes from residing on the political periphery to occupying the political centre has been really disappointing. The events of the last year have moved racism and race within our society from the political margins to the political centre. Seldom is there a time when we do not make it a competing element.

What the report around the white working class did last week was very predictable. It was always going to create this adversarial identity culture war where it is white people who are suffering more than black and ethnic minority people, and here is the data to prove it. It does not acknowledge the fact that, potentially, successive Governments have failed white working class people. The lack of financial investment in our education system, the cutting back of resources over the last 10 to 15 years and those austerity measures have had huge implications for that dynamic.

Importantly, it is interesting that the comparisons are always made with black and ethnic minority people. They are never made against white middle and upper-class people. There is a very selective dialogue in terms of how we make this adversarial. It is difficult for people to do, but when we lean into our institutionally racist society, which was, in many respects, crystallised through the Macpherson report and eulogised by Amdivar Sindovan 15 years prior to that, there are some things that are really important to acknowledge.

It is difficult for people to hear, but black and ethnic minority people, along with other competing intersects, encounter more discrimination in terms of getting jobs and having better outcomes in education, employment and the labour market. They do not need to be competing elements. Using such a reductionist and almost cheap type of identity politics is not helpful to anyone, because they are not competing elements. They are quite remarkably different.

I say they are remarkably different because one basis or one context is purely based on people's skin colour—I am talking about black and ethnic minority people. They have a name that sounds foreign, they are less likely to get a job, they walk into an interview space and, automatically, there is a huge likelihood that, based on unconscious biases, the metric they will be judged against will be the colour of their skin. Historically, we can think about the deficit approaches that are applied to black and

ethnic minority people, particularly within British society over the last 50 to 60 years.

It is important not to subvert the needs and problems of the white working class, but to make them competing, adversarial and to have them in competition with one another is rather predictable when you think about how that narrative has always been spun historically. The important issue is to recognise them as two separate issues, one of which, in many respects, a particular group has no control over. You cannot control something biological like race, yet it is a determiner that we use to continuously discriminate against black and ethnic minority people.

Q201 Lord Davies of Oldham: None of us underestimates the degree to which prejudice exists in our society. In high-level sport, we have footballers taking the knee to demonstrate the necessity of different attitudes. I want to bring an element of optimism to this. At lower levels, where talent is respected and one is talking not about a career but contribution to a common endeavour, there has been a considerable improvement in a great deal of our country in ordinary sport.

I take from that the way that education has to play a much more formidable role than sport can do. Education, faced with a situation where it is well aware of the fact that large numbers of the people it is educating have prejudice stacked against them, has to do more to counteract it. This means there has to be a greater relationship between education, employers and those who take the decisions on recruitment. A great deal of this falls on the technical sector, because that is the one that has close relationships with employers anyway.

Ensuring that young people get the opportunity of work placements to show their ability to the employer would be more successful than what we are relying upon at present, which is contacts, and particularly contacts that we know their parents cannot possibly provide to the same degree among the ethnic minorities. We know how much it goes on elsewhere. I look towards education playing a much more significant role in this respect. We can, institutionally, create circumstances in which the educational institutions play their full part.

Dr Jason Arday: I totally agree. As an ex-PE teacher, my bias will always lean into sport as a chorus for society to sing to. Education as a whole needs to do more to counteract the narratives that have been suggested. There is a place now for education to truly be a tool for social mobility. There were many problems with new Labour, but fundamentally for people of my generation it provided opportunities for people to become more socially and educationally mobile. It would be good to go back to a time, or to have a time in the present, where we have education as that tool for social mobility once again.

Dr Gurleen Popli: I will point to the IFS report. One thing that it pointed out is that, although there are educational successes among ethnic minorities, it is not translating as you would expect to the labour market. Although education is a route towards mobility and has a very important

role to play, that by itself will not address the fundamental discussion we are having here.

Q202 Lord Baker of Dorking: May I say how much I admire what you are doing? Fighting disadvantage is one of the great things to do and I fully support what you are doing. I am not going to ask you a question. I am going to share a bit of information that you might find helpful. In the last 12 years, I have been developing university technical colleges that teach youngsters from the ages of 14 to 19. We have discovered that they transform the life chances of lots of Asian and black children.

Can I give you an example on Asian children? We have a UTC in Tower Hamlets, the Mulberry School. You will know about the Mulberry School. It has 80% Bangladeshi girls, I think. They wanted a technical school and chose two subjects: health and creative arts. In health, they worked with the local hospital and thought about being paramedics, nurses, technicians in hospitals for equipment or data analysts. Last year, we had 78 leavers who were girls and 80% of them went to university. If you are born in Tower Hamlets you have a less than 20% chance of going to university. I am not boasting about this. It is a truth we stumbled upon: high-quality technical education is a social mobility mover.

On black children, we have a UTC on the edge of Toxteth, where there were race riots in 1981. It does bioscience, pharmaceuticals and drugs, because Liverpool is full of drugs—I mean the production rather than the use of drugs. We took in 30 youngsters about three years ago. If you are born in Toxteth, your chance of going to university is less than 20%. Some 80% went to university.

These are striking figures. I am not boasting about this. This is a truth we have stumbled upon: if you have high-quality technical education, you become much more socially mobile. Could I persuade you to have a look at this and see where you could extend high-quality technical education into our education system? You should be champions of that. At the moment, it is far too academic. That is my observation, rather than my question. You may want to say something about it.

Dr Gurleen Popli: You are absolutely right. The two cases you have pointed out filled a gap that we know of. These are young people who want to do something, they just do not know which way to go. You provided that path for them. I do not know about these initiatives. Thanks a lot for pointing it out. I am definitely interested in looking more into how they work.

Dr Jason Arday: I extend my thanks to Lord Baker for his endeavour in this area and for mobilising opportunities for people from ethnic minority backgrounds. It is to be hugely applauded and I will definitely look into the seminal work you have done. Thank you very much. That provides a really good chorus for people to move to in terms of where we could be, and really good case studies of where these types of interventions have worked and how we can roll them out effectively or disseminate them nationally.

Q203 Lord Layard: One really important lesson coming out of this really

interesting discussion is the importance of young people having suitable networks through which they get into employment. They are not there for many children and young people. It is our job, as a committee, to think of ways of compensating for the lack of those networks.

This brings one to something that is not the same as careers education. We are talking about personalised career placement and support with placement. We are talking about it within schools, colleges and universities, but also outside. Is it right to think of that as perhaps almost the central problem that we are discussing today? How can that be improved? I know that some of our witnesses have pointed out that, outside education, there is none at all for people who do not qualify for universal credit. That is surely something we should be pointing out.

Is there something concrete that we could be saying about getting better personalised placement support? The mentoring idea is very interesting but there is probably a problem of not enough people to do all the work that is needed. Dr Popli, could we start with your reflections on how to improve placement support?

Dr Gurleen Popli: I know the problem, but I am not sure whether I know the answer to it. I know that networks are important for young people and young people from ethnic minorities do not have them. The solution has to be multifaceted. One of them is proper career guidance and career placement in schools, but it has to be more than that.

It has to be either through Jobcentre Plus or career fairs, where you actually get them in touch with employers and ask those employers to look at them when they normally would not even consider their CVs. It has to go beyond career placements in schools. It has to be something where employers come forward and are willing to engage and look at it with young people.

Lord Layard: Dr Arday, do you have any more thoughts beyond your excellent mentoring idea?

Dr Jason Arday: One thing that is integral to a lot of this is how we categorise and think about opportunity. Dr Popli makes a really good point about the dearth of potential mentors that we could have at our disposal. One of the things that is really important that placement providers should be thinking about the types of disadvantage that people from particular groups may face. It is important to provide training for those individuals who hold those placement opportunities so that they have a literacy of these kinds of inequalities. There is very often an absence of this literacy. That can impact people's experiences of placements and opportunities in the work. There could be more investment in upskilling senior stakeholders within these placements to better support people from ethnic minority backgrounds and socially less economically developed backgrounds.

Q204 **Baroness Newlove:** This has been a really good nitty-gritty session and it saddens me, because we are talking about young people here. It does not matter what colour skin or what group of people; we want to do the best for every student to get the best education. Dr Popli mentioned

careers and having people go to careers fairs and Jobcentre Plus to find out about careers. It is about soft skills. I think the Bishop and I agree on this. We are very much on the soft skills. We miss this. We get so bogged down on policy. The evidence you have both given has been brilliant, because you have really cut it down, made it factual and put it in a language everybody can understand.

I am looking at the educational performance among people from ethnic minority backgrounds in comparison with their fellow white cohorts. What are the reasons for such differentials? Is it that they just do not feel part of society? Is it parental issues? I am really concerned about the job issues as well as their education.

We need to start looking at the softer skills to give them that confidence to ask such questions. We just presume that they move from one to the other to the other and we get results, and then we put them in a box. I think that is why we are seeing the white privilege and the black division. We have put them in boxes, but actually we should start treating them as young people who deserve a good education. Everybody has discussed my question, so I am trying to move it in a way where we can get some further answers.

Dr Gurleen Popli: Let me clarify. Are you asking about the gap in the soft skills among people from different backgrounds?

Baroness Newlove: Yes, because I think that has to do with their education performance, to be perfectly honest.

Dr Gurleen Popli: There are two things. If you are looking at strictly educational performance, such as the GCSEs they get and everything, ethnic minority students are doing well. They get more GCSEs. There was a Sutton Trust report a couple of years back where they broke it down for kids receiving free school meal. If you look at achieving five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including English and maths, among those kids 28% of whites achieved that and every ethnic minority does more than that. Asians are at about 48% and blacks are at about 41% or 42%.

Even when you control for socioeconomic disadvantage—they all receive free school meals—it is said that part of the reason why kids from ethnic minorities do better than white kids may be about the motivation, aspirations and expectations at home. We have universally found now that these are much higher among ethnic minority families than white families. Irrespective of whether the child is able or not, the expectation is, "You will go to school and do well". Everything else is on the side.

This is the environment. When you talk about young people's soft skills, there is now a massive recognition that they are very important for labour market success. That includes things such as self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy. We talk a lot about these and they are important. Are they systematically different between young people from different backgrounds? I do not know whether we know that. At least, I do not know whether we know that they are systematically different between different groups.

Are they perceived to be systematically different between different groups? Yes, we know that they are. If a white woman walks in and she is confident, she is a confident white woman. If I walk in and am confident, I am a trouble-maker. The same confidence can be and is interpreted in a different way across different ethnicities. I do not know whether they are systematically different between groups, but I know that they are systematically interpreted in different ways.

Although we need to nurture these soft skills among young people because we know they are very important for labour market outcomes, at the same time we need to break down the stereotypes attached to them. A white young boy standing and saying something loudly would be called assertive. A black young boy saying that would make people react in a completely different way. It is that that we need to break down.

Baroness Newlove: I agree with you about what society and cultures think of them. I have seen some quite different aspects in all colours of people. I have recently read a report by a Muslim women group. Some 70% of Muslim women who are educated the same as white women are overlooked for the white women. They are left behind in the workplace. I am really concerned about that. I want to put in the women bit. Even though the ethnic groups are higher, there is the gender issue. I will put my original question back to Dr Arday, please.

Dr Jason Arday: From my experience, having been a schoolteacher, one thing that was so important for mobilising soft skills was this aspect of the hidden curriculum. In many respects, it was not the stuff you teach for examination, for some sort of summative assessment. It was more around life skills. Ironically, a lot of those kinds of conversations happen in the corridor. They happen just after or before class, but they always became the most important tenets for students to take away.

We have lost that, because there is a mechanical way in which we all have to teach within the national curriculum, which is quite restrictive. We have become really focused on key performance indicators. That has placed so much pressure on teachers and taken away that unique aspect of the hidden curriculum, which does a lot of that self-actualisation, preparing people in a really pastoral, organic way to be able to go into society. We know that the absence of those soft skills, which generate a particular type of confidence, is particularly significant in people from ethnic minority groups and the white working class, generally speaking.

As Dr Popli said, there is a confidence that people who may have access to private education, for example, or grammar schools or independent schools have because it is instilled in them. What become systematically and fundamentally different are the narratives we attach to particular groups of people. The disruption of those narratives is really important in ensuring that we recognise those soft skills in the most organic way. There is the idea that, for example, a person of colour can be perceived as being aggressive, whereas a person who is white may be seen as being assertive in a particular context. We need to disrupt that as a narrative.

It becomes really important that soft skills fundamentally provide people with this toolkit to be able to navigate through society. In my opinion, the purpose of education is to prepare people to take their place in society. It is really important that we do not lose that central premise. Those soft skills complement technical and academic skills, but fundamentally they are what get people the opportunities in the cauldron of the interview space, the work space or going for promotions and progressions. It is also recognising the inequities that are wrapped around that.

Baroness Newlove: It is very interesting, because we are hearing that employers do not have the time to invest when they employ a young person who might not have the skillset to show that they have knowledge and the character to work for their company. I am a little concerned that there is a gap there. The employers just look at profits, whereas that young person is proud to have a job but is not getting the skills to give them the confidence through the workplace as well. We are missing that. Thank you for your answers. I could listen to this for quite a long time. There is so much to unpick here.

Q205 Lord Hall of Birkenhead: This is a question with a narrow focus: it is about apprenticeships. I wonder whether you have any insights on apprenticeships. You know what we are seeing overall, but in the age range we are looking at the number of people taking up apprenticeships is going down. All of us want to do something about that. When you look particularly at young people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, they continue to be much less represented in apprenticeships than others. I wonder whether both or either of you have any insights into what is going on there and what we might recommend is done about that.

Dr Jason Arday: The short answer is that parents of black and ethnic minority people have quite sharp elbows about what they would like their children to do and what kinds of professions they would like their children to go into. Having two African parents, I can speak to that. There is this idea among black and ethnic minority communities that you have to work twice as hard, and it is true: you do have to work twice as hard. We do not all start at the same line. There are many inequalities that illustrate that and have been there for us all to see.

Among black and ethnic minority communities, particularly parents, there is this thought that education is the best way to really progress and penetrate the layers of inequality within society. A lot of the focus goes into investing in education. For black and ethnic minority people who may not be able to go to private school, for example, they will invest in private tutoring and supplementary schooling to ensure they give their children the best opportunity possible.

It is really because there is this idea that, to detangle oneself from this spiral of inequality, discrimination and inequity, the best way to weaponise and equip yourself is with a robust academic education. I am not suggesting that that is the only means by which to be successful, but when we think about the deficit and the disadvantage that black and ethnic minority people face, rightly or wrongly there is a currency that

having an academic education has in comparison to an apprenticeship technical education.

Lord Hall of Birkenhead: It is a starker example of a broader issue we have between academic and technical.

Dr Jason Arday: Yes. It is important to caveat that point by saying that both are equally important. In the guise and the scope of a society that is deemed unequal, the thing with wisdom, which parents will profess to have, is that they tend to advise their children through their own lived experiences of what they perceive will give their child the best opportunity to succeed within a British society.

Dr Gurleen Popli: I absolutely agree with what Dr Arday said. Parents of these young people from ethnic minorities perceive that their children are entering an unequal workspace and they would prefer them to enter with higher academic qualifications than with vocational. Whether that wisdom is correct is a different issue, but that is the perceived wisdom.

Q206 **Lord Storey:** I am absolutely lost for words, because so much has been packed into this session. I have a few observations that you might like to comment on. My wife and I were both teachers in Liverpool. We both taught in really disadvantaged communities. I was a primary teacher—you will probably know this, Dr Arday—in Halewood, which was, at one time, a very large white working class council estate. On my staff of 12 teachers, I had three black teachers. That had a profound effect for the good on all the children at that primary school and the community as a whole.

My wife taught at a comprehensive secondary school, which kept changing its name for some reason. You will know Childwall. It very much drew children from the inner city. She would come home and say to me all the things you have said. It is almost like hearing these again, many years later.

I have a great worry in this conversation—this has been a conversation in many ways, and there is so much you have both said that I entirely agree with. We are failing young people from all social backgrounds. I really agree with that. At the end of this Select Committee, we will have to put together a report, which will have a limited number of recommendations. I really do not want us to miss the important points you have made, which will obviously be included in the narrative. We need to ensure that there are, for want of a better phrase, some clear-cut, crisp recommendations that we can put forward that capture some of the things you have said. You have mentioned networks. I liked the phrase “navigational pathways”, for example.

I do not know whether you could write to us or we could come back at some stage. As important as this conversation has been, I do not want us to go away and not have some clear recommendations on what to say. Does that make sense?

Dr Gurleen Popli: If you are looking for two clear-cut recommendations, there is one that should be easy to implement, because the public sector already does it. When hiring decisions are made, personal identities

should be kept separate so that young people are hired on their qualities to do the job and not what their name is. Because the public sector already does it, large-scale private sector organisations at least should be able to do that. That is a straightforward recommendation that is within the law and easy to implement. You can make companies do that.

My second recommendation, if you really want a limited number of recommendations, relates to Dr Arday's point about role models and a national mentoring scheme. My only concern with that is that you will have to go beyond youth unemployment. When you start looking around, the problems are systematic at every level. You will have to address how companies and different employers are hiring or promoting people from different backgrounds that they hire. Those are two simplistic bullet points.

Dr Jason Arday: There should be appropriate and continual training to help staff, particularly for people in the labour market who provide opportunities, to become intersectionally and racially literate in terms of recognising the types of issues that particular groups may face on gaining or entering the labour market.

Q207 **Lord Baker of Dorking:** We were talking a little while back about soft skills, positive skills and self-employment skills. I would add communication skills; they are very important for black and Asian students, if I may suggest. The one skill you should both campaign for is to say that, when students leave at 16 and 18, black and Asian students must have data skills, because their jobs will involve data, whatever they are doing, whether they are doing a high-level job, a medium job or a lower job. Your voice should be very loud on that. If it is loud enough, perhaps the education system may listen to you.

Dr Gurleen Popli: I completely agree with that. That is all I can say.

Dr Jason Arday: Equally, I completely agree and would like to thank Lord Baker again for the amazing work that he has done and continues to do.

Lord Baker of Dorking: You can do it now. You can get those data skills embedded.

Dr Jason Arday: I will.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I thank Dr Popli and Dr Arday very much indeed for their evidence. You can tell from the responses of colleagues in questioning that, as Lord Storey said, it has been more of a discussion. It has been very helpful and useful. If there is anything further you want to raise or suddenly think we ought to be made aware of, you can write to us through the secretariat system. On behalf of the committee, I extend our very warm thanks to you for being witnesses with us this morning.