

Youth Unemployment Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Youth unemployment

Tuesday 13 July 2021

10.15 am

Watch the meeting

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

Evidence Session No. 20

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 208 - 218

Witness

I: Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister for School Standards, Department for Education.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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

Examination of witness

Nick Gibb.

Q208 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. This morning the committee is very pleased to welcome the right honourable Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards in the Department for Education. Minister, can I extend a very warm welcome to you and ask you to say a word or two of introduction?

Nick Gibb: Thank you very much for inviting me to discuss these issues with your committee today. As you say, I am the Minister of State for School Standards, and the MP for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton.

The Chair: It falls to me to ask the first question of you, which is about something the committee has spent several months examining. How do you feel the national curriculum is preparing young people for the modern labour market and the skills required to be successful within it? I am referring to things such as essential skills, digital skills, life skills and so on.

Nick Gibb: We reformed the national curriculum from 2010. It took quite a few years to reform, consult and then implement the new national curriculum. It is a knowledge-rich curriculum, because the research from cognitive psychologists is that a knowledge-rich curriculum helps develop those skills you are talking about: creativity, problem-solving and the ability to learn. You enhance those skills by having quite a lot of knowledge in your long-term memory. That is really the thrust of what we were trying to do back in 2010.

We have improved the knowledge in the STEM subjects—science, technology, and maths in particular—and in the years since 2010 we have seen the proportion taking at least two science GCSEs rise from about 63% in 2010 to 96% today. You mentioned digital. We introduced a computing curriculum in 2014, replacing what had become an outdated ICT curriculum. Britain was one of the first G20 countries to introduce coding into the primary curriculum.

In 2014 we introduced a new maths curriculum in primary schools, which became compulsory. This is based on the maths curriculum in some of the highest-performing countries and jurisdictions in the world, particularly in south-east Asia, in Singapore, and the city of Shanghai. That forms the basis of our approach to maths teaching, with what is called maths mastery, where we expect every child to be taught the same curriculum in primary school and to achieve high levels of fluency in arithmetic.

Of course, we have systematic phonics, making sure children can read, based on the evidence that a systematic approach to the teaching of reading using phonics is the most effective way of teaching children to

read. Since we introduced the phonic check the proportion reaching the expected standard has risen from 58% in 2012 to 82% in 2019, although we need to go further and that figure needs to be higher.

Modern foreign languages are very important skills for children and young people to have, particularly in a global economy and an outward-facing country, as Britain is. Again, we need to do more in this area but we have seen a rise in the proportion taking a modern language, from 40% to 47% in 2019.

Arts and music are also hugely important in a modern economy. A lot of Britain's soft power around the world is based on our music industry. The arts are hugely important in their own right, but also in supporting manufacturing.

The Chair: I understand the importance of a knowledge-rich curriculum, which you referred to. I add to that that one of your department's priorities is to ensure that education builds character, resilience and well-being. Could you say a little more about how the national curriculum ensures the development of those skills? To what extent are those being delivered when the most important thing seems to be the knowledge-rich curriculum?

Nick Gibb: The national curriculum is the "national" curriculum, but that is not the whole curriculum of a school. We made the distinction between the national curriculum and the school curriculum. The school curriculum goes beyond the national curriculum. For example, schools have a statutory duty as part of a broad and balanced curriculum to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. That includes issues such as developing children's character.

Mental health is of course a hugely important issue for the Government. It has become an increasing priority because of Covid, but even before it we were worried about children's mental health and all the pressures on young people that we did not necessarily have in my generation when I was growing up. The Green Paper on mental health has been a pivotal part of the Government's reform programme, making sure that schools can support children's mental health. Indeed, in terms of the curriculum, the relationships, sex and health education curriculum features mental health and how to protect your mental health as a child. Part of the curriculum is about teaching children to protect their mental health in the same way that they protect their physical health.

There are other issues such as PE. Sport in school is hugely important. Exercise is a way of building character and protecting mental health. I do not disagree with your priority; it is a priority we share: that as well as an academic curriculum we need to build those other characteristics that make for a successful life.

Q209 Lord Layard: I wanted to ask you, Minister, about a couple of things. First, it is wonderful that relationships, sex and health education has been made a compulsory part of the curriculum. That is a huge step forward, but it does not say at all how much of it there has to be. We know that many schools are discharging it with half a day or a day a term and so

on. Have you considered having some guidance as to how much there should be? There used to be something like one lesson a week in PSHE. Should there not be some guidance on that?

Secondly, you mentioned mental health, and what you said was really welcome, but the aim announced following the Green Paper was that one-third of the country should be covered by the new mental health support groups by 2023. Should that ambition not be increased and the rollout more rapid?

Nick Gibb: Those are both very important questions. On time, we are not permitted by statute to specify the time on any particular area of the curriculum, whether that is maths, English, history or indeed RSHE. We have provided quite a lot of detail about the content that needs to be taught. We have also produced about 15 modules in how to train teachers in delivering some of the more sensitive areas of RSHE, but we have not specified the time. There is resistance in the sector to specifying time in a curriculum. We believe in professional autonomy and devolving these decisions to the school, but it is something that we continue to look at. I particularly worry about how much time we are spending on sport as well, which is important, but so far we have shied away from specifying time on these issues.

On mental health, the original ambition in the Green Paper was for a quarter of schools to be supported by a mental health support unit by 2023, but every school would have a senior mental health lead appointed in it. That is ambitious, because this is a very real reform and we are having to train 8,000 people to deliver that mental health support. That is not an easy objective. When Jeremy Hunt was Health Secretary we wanted to be as ambitious as we possibly could, but given the fundamental change and the level of skills you need in those mental health support units, even reaching a quarter of schools was demanding. As you know, since then we have announced another £79 million to extend that quarter to over a third. Again, that is an ambitious achievement. Of course I wish we could go faster and further, but it is not even just about money; it is about finding the right people and training them.

Q210 **Lord Storey:** As you have said, the Government have reformed academic qualifications to ensure a clear progression from GCSEs to A-levels to a degree, but government skill reform does not do this for vocational education. Why? The 14 to 16 vocational offer that sits alongside GCSEs is not designed to progress to the new courses, does not meet the needs of employers, who report a lack of practical rather than academic aptitude, and is hampering apprentice recruitment. They are set by awarding organisations without common grades, assessment, methods, purpose, et cetera. Do we not need more well-designed and rigorous vocational courses alongside GCSEs?

Nick Gibb: We do, and that is what the Sainsbury review was about. It is what the T-level reforms are about. You talked about 14 to 16, but this is post-16. The idea of the reforms to vocational and technical qualifications is to develop the same kind of progression that is so commonly accepted

in academic qualifications. That is what we are seeking to do with T-levels. It is very important that, prior to 16, children have an academic education: that their maths, English and science is as well-developed and knowledge-rich as possible, so that they are prepared at the age of 16 to go into a technical route, an academic route or a combination of both. Whatever they want to do, they are best prepared for that with a very rigorous academic education up to the age of 16.

That does not mean to say that, from the age of 14 and even earlier, some curriculum time cannot be spent on more practical subjects, but the overwhelming view is that children need to have an academic education. This is something that Alison Wolf felt very strongly about when she did our review of vocational education in 2011, although she did say that some children who have a particular interest could spend up to a fifth of their curriculum time prior to 16, from the age of 14, on a more vocational route. But the consistency and progression route has been designed from the age of 16-plus.

Lord Storey: We know that probably 50% of young people at secondary school are not academic. That is not to say that maths and English are not important to them. Are we looking at how we can develop their vocational opportunities when they are at school, particularly from 14 to 16? Where do you see the role of BTEC in this?

Nick Gibb: We have been conducting a review of level 2 and level 3 qualifications. We have been consulting on those to ensure that they are of the highest quality and that they provide that progression route. On the children who you say are less academic, none the less, whatever academic ability a child has we need to make sure that that academic ability is developed to its full extent. We live in a modern, demanding, challenging, regulated world. We need to make sure that every child is reading as fluently and as sophisticatedly as possible. Their mathematics needs to be sophisticated. If they want to run their own business they will have to have very sophisticated mathematics. They will need to understand the basics of science and have a good general knowledge of the humanities, and an introduction to a foreign language. All this knowledge is hugely important for whatever route a young person chooses and whatever academic ability they have.

That is really what we are seeking to do prior to the age of 16. After 16 we want to make sure that whatever route young people go down is of the highest quality and will lead to progression. That is what we are seeking to do with the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper, and it is what we are seeking to do through the reforms to T-levels.

Q211 **Lord Empey:** You just referred to T-levels. Were you not concerned by the announcement a few weeks ago by some universities that they would not recognise them with regard to their admission criteria?

Nick Gibb: Universities are autonomous, independent institutions. They have to make these decisions based on their own judgments. T-levels are new. I believe very strongly that they are of a very high quality and that they provide a very strong foundation for progression to the next stage of a person's career. It may be that some universities do not think a

particular T-level is suitable for particular subjects. Of course, that is the same for A-levels and other qualifications, but it would be wrong to give a *carte blanche* view that T-levels are not a high-quality qualification, because they certainly are. That has been the driving force behind the introduction of T-levels from the very beginning. We wanted to make sure that they were employer-led but that they developed the skills and knowledge that young people need to go into a particular technical route.

Q212 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I want to take you back for a moment, before I ask you my allocated question, to something you said in response to Lord Shipley at the beginning about the way that schools are encouraged to provide a wide range of opportunities for their young people to study. Would you accept that there is some concern about the impact of EBacc and Progress 8 on the willingness of schools to do that? A lot of them are very focused on meeting the criteria set within EBacc and Progress 8, and they are marginalising quite a lot of subjects that you referenced, particularly within the arts but also design and technology, which are very important subjects.

I am not accusing the schools here, but I am suggesting that you might accept that the rate of entrants at GCSE for a lot of those subjects reveals that they are simply not being taken up. Do you think the EBacc and Progress 8 are the right way of assessing young people and their outcomes, and indeed the schools they attend? I then want to ask you a bit about something else.

Nick Gibb: I look forward to that. The answer to your question is that I do, yes. EBacc is a very important performance measure for schools. It is a social mobility measure. The EBacc is the proportion of young people entered for the combination of GCSEs: English, maths, at least two science GCSEs, a humanity—either history or geography—and a foreign language. This combination is taken for granted by more prosperous families and by a lot of countries around the world, where it is commonplace that that is the combination that young people will study until the age of 16, and in some countries to the age of 18.

We have deliberately kept the EBacc small enough so that there is scope beyond it for young people to take subjects that are of particular interest to them. If you look at the arts, for example, since the introduction of the EBacc in 2010 the proportion of young people taking at least one arts GCSE has fluctuated across the years but it has remained broadly stable, with entries in 2020 at about 44%. Music, for example, has always had about 6% or 7% of the cohort taking it. Of course, up until key stage 3 it is compulsory, but at key stage 4 it is optional. I would like that figure to be higher, but you do not make it higher by not having EBacc. You make that proportion higher by making sure that the curriculum in music up until the end of key stage 3 is of a high quality. This is why we published the model music curriculum a few months ago to do that.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: What you say about the historical rate of entry for examinations in music and other arts subjects is that they have never been at the very top of the list, but what I am concerned about and want you to comment on is the decline from where they were

to where they are now, which in percentage terms appears, according to the statistics that I have looked at, to be quite catastrophic in some areas.

Leaving music aside for a moment, we took evidence on the rate of entry for design and technology, which has really plummeted. There are double impacts there, are there not? There is the impact on the subjects themselves and the students taking them, but also on the ability to find and recruit teachers for those subjects. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Nick Gibb: I do not deny some of the issues you are raising, but I do not attribute them to the EBacc. The proportion taking design and technology was falling before the introduction of the EBacc. There were concerns about the content of the design and technology curriculum, and that is why we brought in Sir James Dyson and the James Dyson Foundation to help us reform and improve design and technology.

As I said, we tried to keep the EBacc small enough so that there is still time in the curriculum for young people to take those other subjects, whether economics, the arts or a second language. We have always resisted pressure to add subjects or pillars to the EBacc for that very reason. You have to address those separate issues. I am very passionate about pushing up the proportion taking music, but you do not achieve that by not having the EBacc. The EBacc is a social mobility issue, as far as I am concerned, because the combination of these subjects keeps the options open for young people for what they do at the next stage of their career. It is a mistake to narrow down those options at the age of 14 or 16. That is why the EBacc is such an important performance measure.

Progress 8 is an important measure. The problem with the previous measure—five or more GCSEs at A* to C—is that it had this threshold. You saw schools focusing on the D/C border instead of helping those children who might be at an E get up to a D or a C, or now a 1 or a 2 up to a 3 or a 4. It is the same at the top end. We want schools to focus on those C-grade and B-grade pupils to get them up to A. That has been the consequence of Progress 8. It has meant that there is now a focus on improving children at all levels.

The other thing I would say in broader terms in answer to your question is that over the years I have done this job or been shadow Minister I have visited hundreds of schools every year. I have seen that the schools that have a genuinely broad and balanced curriculum, with really good sport, really good music and arts and a lot of after-school clubs, are the ones that get the high academic standards. If you want to do well in the EBacc, the best way to do so is to have that broad and balanced curriculum.

The Sutton Trust published a study a couple of years ago. It looked at 300 schools that had shifted their curriculum towards the EBacc combination. They saw improvements in the grades of those pupils in English and maths, and particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds performing better. You also see higher staying-on rates with schools that have high EBacc rates.

Q213 Lord Clarke of Nottingham: For what it is worth, I agree entirely with everything you have said so far on EBacc. Do you think there is a case for digital skills being added to the existing list? We are told there is a great lack of digital skills by employers taking on school leavers. In the modern world, not only preparation for employment but preparation for modern life must include a necessary basis of digital skills, which at the moment are not given quite the same priority in the curriculum as EBacc subjects.

Nick Gibb: Michael Gove added computer science to the science pillar. It is biology, chemistry, physics and computer science. That was added later to address the very issue you are concerned about. We did change the ICT curriculum and we changed it to computing, and that is compulsory at key stages 1, 2 and 3. It evolves. We are a leading country in this area—other countries have followed us since—in getting programming into the primary school and secondary school curriculums. Children are learning not just how to use Excel but how to program their own computer programs.

We have a series of computing hubs, because the level of knowledge needed to teach this is a major change for the teaching profession. We have been working with Raspberry Pi and we have set up a series of computing hubs around the country to spread the best practice of how to teach what is quite a demanding subject.

Q214 Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Just to move this on a bit, you will know there is now a body of opinion that is questioning quite seriously whether major public examinations at the age of 16 are any longer the right way to mark the progress of a young person through school, given that the leaving age, or the point at which people can leave full-time education or training, is effectively 18. I know you have a view about that, but can you explain why these tests are still serving the interests of young people? Can you particularly address the vexed question of people stuck in resit hell, who have to keep going back to their English and maths, and the layering of failure on failure that can sometimes lead to?

Nick Gibb: These are very good questions. I feel very strongly that GCSEs are an important exam at 16. You talked about the leaving age; it is really the participation age.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: That was my bad use of language; I accept that entirely.

Nick Gibb: You corrected yourself by saying they have to stay in education or training. That is the requirement: you have to be in either education or further education, or in a job with training leading to a recognised qualification.

It means there is quite a large minority of young people for whom the GCSE is the last academic qualification that they will take. They will then go on to take, train for and study for a very worthwhile vocational qualification, but in five or 10 years' time they may decide they no longer want to be a computer technician and they would like to go into retail or do something else, working with people. All they would have to show a new employer is a very high-quality technical qualification in computing if

there were no GCSEs, whereas an employer would want to know that this person is competent in reading and writing, that they have a GCSE in English and maths and so on, and a broad range of general knowledge subjects. That is why it would be wrong and damaging to that particular group of young people not to have some form of certification of their academic achievements at the age of 16.

In this country just under half of young people at the age of 16 transfer institutions, which is unusual compared with some other countries around the world. That is another reason why you need something at 16.

It also ensures that schools are providing a broad and balanced academic curriculum to all young people. Again, it is part of social mobility and making sure that every child, whatever their background, has that rigorous academic education, at least until the age of 16, which is what they will need if they are going to succeed and participate in a modern society and economy.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: Could you address the issue of resits, please, Minister?

Nick Gibb: The condition of funding policy that came in a few years ago is very important. We know the additional lifetime earnings of young people who have a grade 4 or above in English and maths is about £100,000. That is a significant sum. Of course, it is not mandatory for those students at college or in an apprenticeship to resit continually, but it is important. There are alternatives to GCSEs. For those young people who have not achieved a grade 3 in GCSE English and maths there are functional skills qualifications as well, but English and maths are important life skills to do well in life. That is why it is very important.

As a consequence of the policy, about 30,000 young people aged 16 to 19 are taking and passing English and maths each year. I am very proud of that figure. Those are 30,000 young people each year who now have a grade 4 or higher in English or maths who would not otherwise have it. Those young people will, as a consequence, have higher lifetime earnings. It is a very good policy. It takes time, of course, for FE colleges to make sure that they are teaching English and maths as effectively as they possibly can to make sure that the pass rate is higher than it has been in recent years.

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: I am very intrigued by the statistic about lifetime earnings, which I have seen in various forms in various places, because I am not entirely sure how we can possibly know about lifetime earnings in relation to an examination system that has not been with us all that long. Let us let that one stick to the wall.

Q215 **Lord Baker of Dorking:** As we are the Youth Unemployment Committee, what is the figure you take as youth unemployment in England today?

Nick Gibb: I will have to write to the committee on that. I would like to get those figures precisely right. I know that prior to Covid the Government were hugely successful in reducing the level of youth unemployment to, from memory, one of the lowest levels it has been at.

Lord Baker of Dorking: I suppose, therefore, you do not know the levels of NEETs at 18, which your department publishes each year?

Nick Gibb: Again, I can write to the committee with those figures.

Lord Baker of Dorking: As the Minister for School Standards, are you not remotely concerned about the level of youth unemployment, which to some extent the school system is producing?

Nick Gibb: Yes, of course. As I said, prior to Covid we had those rates down to the lowest level that they have ever been, and I am very proud of that. Everything that we have been doing with our education reforms has been about ensuring that young people can not just have a fulfilling life, because education is about more than employment, but participate in society on an equal basis to others. That is why a common, knowledge-based curriculum is important. It is also about ensuring that they have the skills. As I said at the beginning of my evidence, a knowledge-rich curriculum helps young people develop those cognitive skills of problem-solving that equip them for life in employment.

Lord Baker of Dorking: We will come to skills later. The unemployment level is 13.2%, which is twice the level of Germany. Youth unemployment in Germany is half ours. Why is Germany better than we are?

Nick Gibb: We have a lot to learn from Germany on technical education. Before Covid, the Secretary of State went to Germany to look at the approach it takes to technical education. A lot of that thinking has fed into the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper, which is one of the prime focuses of the department: how do we improve the skills route for young people who are not going down the academic route, to make it as clear and as high-quality as the academic route that we have all got used to understanding? The complexity of the skills route is one of our particular problems in this country.

Lord Baker of Dorking: You have not solved it. There are now 109,000 16 to 24 year-olds in long-term unemployment as a consequence of the policies you have been following.

Let me move on to my second question. We have received a lot of evidence about the curriculum, the EBacc and Progress 8 from business, research groups, students and the unemployed. Most of it has been completely critical and hostile. Are you aware that this curriculum that you are defending so strongly is word for word the curriculum announced in 1904 by the Secretary to the Board of Education?

Nick Gibb: That does not render it bad. Maths, English and reading are as important today as they were in 1904 or at any time. It is hugely important that children and young people's reading ability is the best it can be, and that their mathematics is as sophisticated as it can be. Maths has moved on but it is still mathematics.

It is important that young people today are introduced to the fundamentals of science: physics, chemistry, biology and computer science. It is hugely important. It is also important that young people know about the history of our country and the key events of the world

that have created the culture we have today in this country and the world. It is important that they know their way around the world, and that they understand where countries are and the important fundamentals of those countries. It is also important in a globally facing, outwardly facing trading nation that our young people are able to learn a foreign language.

Lord Baker of Dorking: It is an Edwardian curriculum, and since 1904 things like the computer, the internet and mobile phones have been invented, all of which are agents of learning. They do not feature much in 11-to-16 schools today.

Nick Gibb: They do. As I mentioned, we have introduced a computing curriculum. It is compulsory in key stages 1, 2 and 3. It is very rigorous. It involves learning how to code, not just how to use computer programs.

The arguments that you are putting—that people can always google things—were the arguments put in the 1920s by people like John Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick at Teachers College, Columbia in New York, that said you do not need to teach children knowledge because they can look it up in an encyclopaedia. If you read Daniel Willingham, he talks about the importance of long-term memory. Getting knowledge into long-term memory is hugely important if you want to be educated and able to solve problems. You cannot always look up every element of the problem you are trying to solve. You need to have a significant amount of knowledge in your long-term memory to draw upon.

Lord Baker of Dorking: You have moved away from data skills. You said that you have a wonderful computing programme for 11 to 16 year-olds. With great respect, you have not. Only 72,000 people took GCSEs in it. That is one in 12. Of those 72,000 who took the GCSE in computing, only 56,000 got through. That is one in 10 of our society today, when we are living in a digital age. When digital skills are going to affect absolutely every job in the future, one in 10 has a result. Are you also aware that we have been told that since 2016 the number of students studying computing in schools has fallen by 42%?

Nick Gibb: On the GCSE, those figures go up each year. This is a new GCSE and it is very demanding. Computing is compulsory. You are talking about key stage 4. It is compulsory in key stages 1, 2 and 3. Not every young person takes all the sciences. Physics is also important in a modern digital economy and a modern, demanding, scientific economy, and not every young person takes physics. All those subjects are compulsory until key stage 3. Science is compulsory until the end of key stage 4. We are training our teachers to teach this subject. It is very demanding, and that is why the computing hub programme, which is accompanied by very significant sums of public funding, is training teachers to teach this curriculum throughout our school system.

Lord Baker of Dorking: It is not being very effective. Are you aware that for the last three years the Leigh UTC in Dartford has recruited students at the age of 11 and they do two hours of computing every week? The result is quite staggering. By 14, 76% want to go on to do digital at GCSE. That is not one in 10. They go on to do A-levels or T-

levels. Why do you not introduce something like that?

Nick Gibb: Schools, of course, are free to do that and different schools will specialise in computing.

Lord Baker of Dorking: With great respect, you say schools are free to do that, but schools are judged by Progress 8. The whole emphasis that you have made since 2010 is that the Progress 8 subjects are the critical subjects. You call that a broad and balanced curriculum. You mentioned music a moment ago. Music has dropped by 25% since 2010. Art has just about stayed the same; it is about 6% off. Drama and dance have dropped dramatically. Where is the broad and balanced curriculum? It is your definition of "broad and balanced", not, in fact, what so many people and so many disadvantaged students want.

Nick Gibb: There is nothing unusual about the subjects in the EBacc. They are maths, English, at least two sciences, history or geography and a foreign language. Those are not an unusual, rarefied combination of subjects. They are commonplace among more affluent sections of society. My very strong opinion is that I want an education system that provides the same quality of education regardless of background. That combination of subjects is very common in most countries around the world until the age of 16 and in some countries around the world until the age of 18. They open doors to the greatest range of opportunities.

We have also kept the EBacc small enough to allow schools to do the kind of things that you are talking about, such as having two hours a week for computer science. It is absolutely a great initiative and I would support it. We have, for example, schools that are part of the Mandarin Excellence Programme, doing four hours of Mandarin a week. They manage to do the EBacc subjects of the humanities and science in addition to that. Of course schools have the flexibility to specialise in areas that are of interest to their pupils.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Your assertion that most schools have that range of subjects is simply not true. It is not true in America, for example. It is not true in one or two European countries. Austria stops the national curriculum at 14 and has technical schools. It is not true in Germany either. Let us not dispute about that. We can argue about that.

Nick Gibb: We will send the committee the evidence.

Lord Baker of Dorking: We have been told that you have written something that reads as follows in an article: "We must strongly resist the calls from those who talk about ripping up our curriculum to make it more 'relevant' or to make it solely about preparing pupils for work". No one is arguing that our education system should just prepare pupils for work but many are arguing now that it should be more relevant. The overwhelming evidence that we have received in this committee from businesses big and small, students themselves and unemployed people is that they want schools to be much more relevant and concerned with employability skills that go wider than your Progress 8 subjects.

Nick Gibb: I respectfully disagree with that. Those subjects that I have mentioned, which are maths, English, two sciences, a humanity and a

foreign language up to the age of 16—I am not saying they should go beyond the age of 16, as in some countries—are fundamental to whatever young people want to go on to next. You need that mathematical skill and knowledge.

Lord Baker of Dorking: We are not arguing against that.

Nick Gibb: Which of the EBacc subjects are you arguing against?

Lord Baker of Dorking: From 2003 to 2010 it was not compulsory to take a foreign language, history or geography. It was left to schools to decide. That worked perfectly well. That introduced a much wider range of technical subjects, some of which were not very good. I quite agree with that and they should have been dropped, but you dropped all the technical subjects in 2011: you threw the baby out with the bathwater. You should not have extracted the tooth; you should have filled it and made it better, and had a better range of technical subjects.

Nick Gibb: That is precisely what we did.

Lord Baker of Dorking: The problem is this: we are concerned about the disadvantaged students in our education system, who amount to roughly 2 million a year, who do not get to level 4 in English and maths. That has not improved at all since 2011, since the curriculum you are advocating. It has not. They are roughly the same figures as in 2016. You are saying that these disadvantaged children will somehow come to the top and bubble up brilliantly if they have your Progress 8 triggers. That is simply not the case. We have rising unemployment.

We have talked to unemployed students in Bolton, Nottingham and London. They all said that they were not prepared for work when they left their schools. They had no data skills or employability skills. They had never done problem-solving. They had never been involved in creative activity of any sort. They had never made anything with their hands. They had not worked in teams. That is what they told us.

Nick Gibb: That may be true, but the point is that, if you read Daisy Christodoulou's book *Seven Myths About Education*, you can see that you can try to teach those skills that you are talking about, which are massively important, such as problem-solving and creativity, but you cannot teach them in isolation. They do not stick. You have to teach them as part of the subject to which they belong. That is how you get those particular skills.

You get problem-solving by having a very good maths curriculum and a really good fundamental understanding of mathematics. You become creative if you have read a lot and you have studied art and so on. That is how you acquire those skills, not by having them taught as isolated skills in their own right. That is what we are seeking to do through a knowledge-rich curriculum. All of the evidence, including from the cognitive psychology discipline, points to that being the approach to develop those skills.

Lord Baker of Dorking: With great respect, I am afraid the evidence does not point to that. We have been sent figures by one research group,

EDSK, that show that the percentage of GCSE pupils entered for all EBacc components has not moved for the last six years and is below 40%.

Nick Gibb: Yes, it has gone to 40%. It was about 20% when we came into office.

Lord Baker of Dorking: With great respect, the percentage of GCSE pupils has levelled off at just below 40%. You are saying they are getting this enormous benefit from your curriculum. Do you know what the percentage of GCSE pupils who pass all EBacc components is?

Nick Gibb: It is significantly less than 40%, I agree.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Yes. Lower than 20% pass all your EBacc components, and you are saying these EBacc components are a shrine to be protected forever, but it has not affected the position of disadvantaged students.

I will end with a couple of very short questions. Are you aware that since 2010 the number of students taking design and technology has fallen by 70%? I think you have said that, yet this is the only technical subject readily available to schools. You, as the Minister responsible for teacher bursaries paid to teachers to encourage them to teach subjects such as physics and maths, earlier this year removed the bursary for design and technology of £15,000, but still retained it as £10,000 for teachers of dead languages. Is that the right balance of priorities in a digital age? You have slashed the bursary for DT but you have retained them for dead languages.

Nick Gibb: We have retained them for all languages, not just Latin. It is modern languages as well. As I said, the design and technology numbers were falling before we introduced the English baccalaureate. The English baccalaureate is not the reason for all the issues that we have to address in other subjects. On the pass rate for the English baccalaureate, I could take you to a number of schools around the country serving very disadvantaged communities that are getting pass rates of 70% or 75% in the EBacc subjects.

Lord Baker of Dorking: But the overall level is 20%, Mr Gibb.

Nick Gibb: We need to do more.

Lord Baker of Dorking: You cannot focus on a few schools you have visited; it is the generality that we are concerned with. I have one last question. As you know, university technical colleges do not have to teach Progress 8 or EBacc. We are not assessed for that by Ofsted, but your department assesses us for our performance on teaching Progress 8 and EBacc. We do not teach those subjects. You publish the assessments, and of course we do very badly as a result. Do you know of any education system in the world that assesses the performance of schools on subjects that they do not teach?

Nick Gibb: My understanding was that there was an exception for UTCs in terms of the EBacc requirement.

Lord Baker of Dorking: There is. We do not teach them at all, but you

publish figures each year assessing how well we do against EBacc and Progress 8. You have written me a letter defending that position. I am asking you again: do you know of any education system in the world that assesses schools on subjects they do not teach?

Nick Gibb: It is important for transparency that we publish all data. That is the system we have in this country to make sure that parents have access to all the data that they need in making those selections.

Lord Baker of Dorking: But we do not teach Progress 8 or EBacc.

Nick Gibb: That is made clear.

Lord Baker of Dorking: It is not made clear at all. You do it because, basically, you do not like technical schools. By the way, that is the success of German education. You do not like UTCs. Have you ever visited a UTC?

Nick Gibb: Yes, of course I have. We have supported the UTC programme from the very beginning when we came into office in 2010. There are now significantly more UTCs than there were when we came into office in 2010. We know that 55% are good or outstanding. Those UTCs have done a very good job and we want them to continue to flourish. They are an important part of our education system.

The EBacc is a very important performance measure. It is about social mobility. We have to make sure that the schools that are not getting the pass rates that they should be improve. We have seen schools improving. When we came into office, 68% of schools were good or outstanding. Today that figure is 86%. There are very good examples of high-performing academies around the country that are getting very high levels of entry into those EBacc subjects and very high pass rates in those EBacc subjects.

Lord Baker of Dorking: Mr Gibb, I disagree. I will make a final point, because I have asked too many questions. You say that Progress 8 is an aid of social mobility. With great respect, I do not believe that at all. It is actually one of the causes of high unemployment. Do you appreciate that UTCs are the agents of social mobility? We have records of 55% of our students going to university. We have a UTC on the edge of Toxteth in Liverpool that took in 30 black students. If you are born black in Toxteth, you have a less than 20% chance of going to university. We had 80% going to university. That is social mobility.

Nick Gibb: I agree. Strong UTCs help people to progress into further education, employment and apprenticeships. I could cite the key stage 5 figures: 87% of UTC pupils are in a sustained education or employment destination compared with 81% in state-funded schools as a whole. I do not disagree with what you are saying, but I disagree with your view about the English baccalaureate. These are common academic subjects: English, maths, science, a humanity and a foreign language.

We are the worst-performing country in Europe when it comes to foreign languages; there is no excuse for that position. We are a globally trading nation. At the very least we need to be able to attempt to speak the

language of our suppliers and our customers. I am determined that we are going to see a rise in the proportion of young people taking foreign languages, which has already risen from 40% to 46%. Before 2004, when Labour removed its compulsory nature at key stage 4, 75% of young people were entered for a foreign language at GCSE. It then dramatically fell between 2004 and 2010. Since then we have improved it from 40% to 46% this year. That is a commendable achievement.

If you look overall at the other four pillars of the EBacc, we are at levels of 75% taking that combination. This provides the widest range of opportunities for young people. I want every young person, regardless of their background, to have the same opportunities as young people from more affluent backgrounds. That is precisely what the EBacc is designed to achieve. There are schools up and down the country serving disadvantaged communities. I could take you to the Star Academies, for example. More than 90% of their young people are taking the EBacc combination of GCSEs. I could take you to Michaela, where, from memory, some 75% are achieving grade 4 or above in those EBacc combination subjects. That is what social mobility is about.

At the same time, we are improving the quality of vocational subjects. You referred to 2011. In 2011 Alison Wolf did a review of vocational qualifications. She removed all those qualifications that were not leading to progression and employment. The ones that were left were very high quality and are still available. We are improving the post-16 vocational route through the T-level reforms, building on the recommendation of the Sainsbury review into how you streamline and simplify the technical route for young people. That is what we are seeking to achieve as a Government, and now we have the *Skills for Jobs* White Paper taking skills education to the next level.

The Chair: Minister, thank you. That has been a very full and important discussion. I am very grateful that we have had that. I think the whole committee would find it very helpful to have something in writing from you on the basic issue of disadvantage and the relevance of EBacc. You have said a number of things and Lord Baker has said a number of other things, but the question the committee would like to know further about is the extent to which EBacc is actually helping reduce disadvantage for those defined as being disadvantaged pupils in schools. Can you do that?

Nick Gibb: Yes, of course. We will do that. I will give you just one statistic. When we came into office in 2010, 63% of young people were taking two sciences or more. Today that figure is 96%. Inevitably, when you have a figure of 96% taking at least two sciences, that means that a considerable portion of disadvantaged young people is now taking at least two sciences when they were not in 2010. We will provide you with those figures as well, broken down by eligibility for free school meals, and you can see how the EBacc is helping disadvantaged people to have the same opportunities as children from more affluent families.

Q216 **The Lord Bishop of Derby:** I want to turn our conversation towards what we would recognise is the key component of the kind of transformation for our young people we are talking about. It is the

teachers—good-quality, committed teachers, of whom there are thousands across the length and breadth of our nation, and for whom we are deeply grateful. Over this past year and a half we have seen the levels of their sacrifice, commitment and faithfulness to our children in the most difficult of circumstances.

We want to get underneath how we are going to ensure an ongoing supply of high-quality teachers across the breadth of the curriculum and the country so that there is the same honouring and resource of teaching in every context for our young people so that they get the best possible teaching and learning, which is what will help them achieve what they need. How can an ongoing supply of high-quality teachers be ensured? How does that intersect with not just getting them into but keeping them in the profession, with professional development and their welfare? Perhaps we will go on, if it is not covered immediately, to particular concerns around ensuring that our teaching profession reflects the diversity of our nation so that children see themselves in the teachers that are helping them to thrive and achieve.

Nick Gibb: I agree with that last objective. We will come back to that in a second. There are 461,000 teachers in the profession, which is about 20,000 more than 10 years ago. You are right: we all owe them a great debt of gratitude, not just for their work prior to Covid but for the way that the profession and support staff have responded to Covid, with all the extra pressures upon schools and their staff during this period.

On teaching, we are absolutely determined. The quality of education can never be higher than the quality of our teachers. We want to make sure that we are recruiting the best and that we are giving them the best training, so that they can be the best. The other worry that we have had is that we are competing in a very demanding market for graduates, where we have had very low levels of unemployment in this country. The competition for graduates is very high, so we want to make sure that we are not losing them as well.

In 2019 we published a recruitment and retention strategy. We are losing too many, for example, in the first few years of coming into the profession. We want to make sure that we help young people who have just left university, taken their PGCE, come into school, with their first flat and their first job. We have to make it easier for them, as it is in other professions. I am not saying it will be easy, but it should be easier than it is at the moment, with better mentoring and better support to make sure that they can cope in this demanding profession and we do not see the rates of attrition that we do.

We introduced the early career framework, which is a two-year programme for the first two years of a young person's career in teaching. That builds on the core content framework for initial teacher training that we have also introduced, to make sure that the curriculum that trainees and graduates get when they are training to be a teacher is the right curriculum to help them do well in the profession. This is a golden thread from ITT to early career.

We then have the national professional qualification, which we have also revised to make sure again that they have those requisite skills for becoming more senior teachers and leaders in the education system. That has been a very important reform that we have been implementing over the last few years to do precisely what you want us to do, which is to have a high-quality profession that is well regarded and attractive for the better graduates to come into.

The Lord Bishop of Derby: Do you feel that is working across the breadth of the curriculum? Are you measuring not just the recruitment and retention of teachers overall but the differentiations in that between different key stages, different curriculum subjects and whether there are ways of nuancing what is offered to ensure that everything gets better and that there is consistency about that across the whole?

Nick Gibb: You are right. Lord Baker touched earlier on the bursaries we offer to certain subjects. We are limited in the amounts of money we have available for those bursaries. Every year we have to adjust it to reflect the recruitment in the previous year, because these are very significant sums of money and we are constrained by how much we allocate to bursaries. For example, we offer very generous bursaries of £24,000 for the three sciences and computing. We offer £10,000 in languages and £7,000 in biology, for example. That will reflect the level of recruitment in the previous year and the level of need for the particular teachers.

You asked about different stages of education. We have done well in recent years in primary recruitment. That is why the bursaries for those teachers were reduced.

We seek to make sure that we are recruiting not just the overall numbers but those subjects. We are not always successful in meeting our targets in some of those subjects. We have fallen short of our targets in physics for a number of years because there are a certain number of graduates in physics and they are in demand in the City of London. They are in demand in business, industry and commerce. We are competing for those graduates. We have a notion of subject knowledge enhancement to help young people with a degree that might be slightly different to get the knowledge that they need to be able to teach those subjects as well.

You asked about the diversity of the teaching profession, which is something I feel very strongly about. As you say, it needs to reflect the society we live in. If you look at the whole 461,000 teachers, it does not do so at the moment. The proportion from different ethnic groups does not reflect the overall population, but it does if you look at the current graduate trainees coming into teaching. The figures for current postgraduate trainees are that 10% were of Asian background, 4% were black, and 3% have mixed ethnicity. That compares to 8%, 3% and 2% respectively of the population as a whole. Going forward we can be optimistic, although we have continually to make sure that we are also retaining those teachers from those different backgrounds.

The Lord Bishop of Derby: Are we tracking where our teachers are being deployed to ensure that the best-qualified teachers who can offer

the very best to our children are deployed across the whole of the country so that there is not a differentiation between the levels of teaching available in different parts of the nation? Otherwise, those who are perhaps already disadvantaged end up being further disadvantaged because their schools have shortages of teachers with the right qualifications and the professional development that will enable the best possible learning for them. Again, is that tracked across the whole curriculum?

Nick Gibb: It is something that we also seek to do. We have retention payments. We piloted having extra retention payments for teachers in certain subjects in parts of the country that have higher levels of disadvantage, for example, which we feel is important.

The Lord Bishop of Derby: I do not know whether colleagues have any follow-up questions, but I am happy to pass on to the really important next set of questions, which are around careers advice, which intersects with teaching professionals.

Nick Gibb: I should add that we have 100% scholarships for teachers to do national professional qualifications in schools with higher levels of pupil premium eligibility. There are a number of schemes like that designed to provide extra CPD for teachers serving disadvantaged communities.

Q217 **Lord Layard:** Minister, I would like to ask you about careers education, which is so important. Of course, it includes not just what experiences young people have in a classroom and through work visits but the individualised, personalised advice that they get, which I know is the eighth of the Gatsby benchmarks. That is, ultimately, the critical thing. Could you tell us whether you think Ofsted is taking this really important element of the school experience seriously enough in its report?

My second question has come up from a number of people who have given us evidence. There is a group of people who have left school, left education and are not in employment but are too young to be eligible for universal credit and therefore get career advice through Jobcentre Plus. This is a group that we are really failing to connect with, advise and support. Do you have thoughts? Are the Government planning to address that issue? It obviously concerns one of the most deprived groups in the community.

Nick Gibb: Ofsted's role is to make sure that schools are providing a broad and balanced curriculum that equips young people to fulfil their potential in life. That is its overarching objective. That includes issues such as careers information, and education advice and guidance. That continues to be an important part of Ofsted's personal development judgment in the new 2019 framework, so it will assess the quality of careers education in schools, which is regarded as very important.

I will need to write to the committee on the other question. That goes slightly beyond my role as a Schools Minister, but we will write to the committee about the issue that you raised.

Q218 **Baroness Newlove:** This has already been addressed, but the question I

am really keen on is mental health, both before the pandemic and obviously with what we are facing now. I work with many teachers who are very concerned. The role mental health and well-being will play in the curriculum at early primary and senior level has been mentioned.

I note that you are looking at 2023 for training and all that, but I am concerned about what we are going to do now. Once everybody goes back in September we are all supposed to be on the baseline of freedom, so to speak. I am concerned about how we are going to tackle a lot of the issues that these children have with their mental health. There are children who have been home longer with domestic abuse and children who are malnourished. Just because we are giving money and vouchers does not mean to say that they are being fed well.

I know that we have a lot of teachers who are suffering with their mental health. It seems that we are putting more on the teachers' shoulders with training and understanding. It does not seem to be a really thorough way of providing a service for everybody and every child to feel secure and well to get through their education.

Nick Gibb: I agree. This is a hugely important issue. It was important before Covid and it has become even more important because of Covid and the impact of lockdown on young people, and indeed the pressure that teachers are under as well. We have funded remedial mental health support measures to help teachers, and to help teachers teach, understand and support young people facing particular mental health issues during the Covid crisis. This is being funded through a programme called the well-being for education recovery programme.

The long-term issue is fundamental reform. That is what we proposed in the Green Paper on children and young people's mental health. That is a very significant reform. It is about having a senior designated mental health lead: a senior member of staff in every school charged with the responsibility of being that designated lead for mental health.

If you talk to the Anna Freud Centre specialists, they talk about different levels of mental health need—lower-level anxiety leading up to needing more support. That is what the mental health support units are designed to achieve: to support the schools in helping those children whose mental health problems are more serious.

Originally we had a target of reaching 25% of schools by 2023. That is an ambitious target, because we are having to train up to 8,000 mental health support professionals. We have now extended that to 33% with the extra £79 million because of the importance of what has happened during the Covid pandemic.

We have also included in the health education element of the relationships, sex and health education curriculum lessons about how children can maintain their mental health and be resilient. Those are things like the importance of sleep and exercise, not spending too long in front of a screen and so on. All those issues are about protecting your mental health, in the same way we teach children how to protect their

physical health. That is in the RSHE curriculum, and there are training modules for teachers to help them to teach those modules as well.

Baroness Newlove: I appreciate what you are saying, but it seems that you are trying to put everything through a very thin needle head to support these children. I work with deprived children in the north, and it seems that we are still putting a lot of pressure on our teachers, who are there to teach, not to be the social worker. I am working with a lot of deprived children who really do not want summer holidays because their outlet is to do that. That is all to do with mental health. I am talking about four year-olds here, not 14 year-olds.

Although I appreciate that we will have a senior leader in our education system, that is not adequate in the light of the pandemic and before it. I appreciate that we have to educate through RSHE, but I am really concerned that will not get through to outside the school gates, where that education needs to be delivered to the parents, so children's mental health will implode.

We need to look at this in a better way than just giving a senior lead of training. We already have pastoral teachers in our high schools. I say that as somebody who has three children with post-traumatic stress disorder. I listen to them. We need to think not just about training but about an understanding of mental health right through the curriculum, because it is not one size fits all. It is also about how you engage them to talk about things that they do not understand but where they are hurt within; that needs more context and to go into the curriculum.

Nick Gibb: I do not disagree with anything you are saying. We are always open to improving the provision that we are already delivering and planning to deliver in schools. We are always open to further discussions about these issues. We work very closely with Peter Fonagy from the Anna Freud Centre and we are always open to doing more.

Do not underestimate the scale of the rolling out of the Green Paper proposals. The mental health support units are a very important additional provision for schools. It was not there before. You might say that 33% of schools is not enough; we agree, but as I said, it is not just about the funding but about training and recruiting the right people. That takes time.

Baroness Newlove: I only say that because the evidence we have been given from young people is that their life skills are not there to be accommodated in the workplace. These are the ones coming through now. They do not have the confidence. They have issues. You also have employers who are looking at them to make profit. They have not got the time to nurture those skills. We need to be doing it as we go along now, not just through the training.

The employers were quite amazed that these students and young people were not prepared for the workplace. That is what is concerning me: that we have missed pupils who are now ready to go into the workplace. They will not be able to be employed and will go on to benefits. That is my last question, Chair. I am sorry; it is just that I am passionate around mental

health.

Nick Gibb: You have veered slightly beyond mental health. On the skills that young people need for the workplace, these were concerns that were there when we came into office in 2010. We sought to address the concerns of employers with our reforms to the national curriculum and our reforms generally to schools. Employers were complaining that young people coming into employment did not have the right literacy skills and their mathematics skills were not at the right level. We sought to address that.

It takes time for these reforms to be implemented. It took us until 2014 before the new curriculum was introduced, and then it takes time for that curriculum to affect young people. The GCSE reforms did not take effect until 2016 and 2017 because of the time it takes to consult and prepare and the lead-in time for schools. It takes time for these reforms to embed.

My view is that the new type of knowledge-rich curriculum gives young people the confidence, cognitive skills, creativity and problem-solving skills that employers seek. All the work we are doing on behaviour with Tom Bennett and with our behaviour hubs is also about changing attitudes to make sure that young people arrive on time, work hard and have the right ethics, and that their behaviour in schools is right, which will then of course translate when those young people go into the workplace.

Everything we have been doing is about raising academic standards, raising standards of behaviour in our schools and giving young people the right cognitive skills so that they can adapt to any workplace environment after the age of 16. These reforms are the right approach to delivering the objectives that you are seeking in your questioning.

Baroness Newlove: I am sorry, but I have to disagree from the evidence we have heard in this committee. That is what my concern is about, as well as the length of time it is affecting those students. Those four years are a long time for a young person to have to do the next stage for university as well. I have to disagree: from the evidence that we have seen, it feels very much that they feel left behind. There seems to be further work that needs to be done.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much. If you think the committee might benefit from reading any written submissions from you on that area, it would be helpful to receive them. Do not worry if there are not.

On behalf of the committee, could I thank you enormously for the time you have given and the way you have responded to all the questions that have been asked of you? It has been very helpful. We shall be reporting probably by the middle of November, I hope. Recess is a little bit in the way, but I am very grateful to you for giving us your time this morning.