HOUSE OF COMMONS

Education Committee

Oral evidence: The Government's Catch-up programme, HC 940

Tuesday 7 December 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 7 December 2021.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Dr Caroline Johnson; Ian Mearns; Kate Osborne; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 1 - 47

Witnesses

I: Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation; David Laws, Executive Chairman, Education Policy Institute; and Nick Bent, Co-Founder and Chief Executive, The Tutor Trust.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Becky Francis, David Laws and Nick Bent.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming today. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on Parliament TV, could I ask you to introduce yourselves formally and give your title? I will start with David.

David Laws: David Laws, chair of the Education Policy Institute.

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

Nick Bent: Nick Bent. Along with Abigail Shapiro, I am one of the co-founders of the Tutor Trust. I am also a trustee of Oasis Community Learning and I serve on the advisory board for the Children's Commissioner for England.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. What are the main obstacles to schools engaging with the National Tutoring Programme? We have seen the report suggesting that Randstad was awarded a £25 million contract to run the NTP, while the maximum contract the Department had offered in the tendering was £62 million. There have been suggestions that Randstad's bid was much cheaper than the other bids. The question is whether this saving was value for money.

Nick Bent: I am afraid that all the evidence that we have seen so far about Randstad's performance in delivering this contract suggests that this is a massive false economy and that the previous Secretary of State made a mistake in awarding this contract to Randstad. The question now is whether the new Secretary of State will do anything about it.

The new Secretary of State has made a fantastic start, I think, and has shown himself willing to listen and engage. He is meeting with a group of us—

Q3 **Chair:** Why was it a mistake?

Nick Bent: Because it seems very clear to us, the front-line delivery organisations for the National Tutoring Programme, that Randstad simply does not have the capacity or the competence to deliver this programme effectively. It is now trying desperately to rectify that. We are collaborating closely with them and trying to help them in every way that we can, but there is a huge question mark about whether it is right for Randstad to continue running this programme for the full three years. The Department for Education has a break clause in the contract after year 1 and year 2 and there are serious conversations—

Q4 **Chair:** What is the evidence that it does not have the delivery capacity that you are suggesting?

Nick Bent: Our day-to-day experience of working with them is that they simply do not have enough staff or the right expertise. There are huge problems with the technology hub that is meant to organise all of the tutoring, and some of us are still refusing to use that tuition hub because it is so dysfunctional. There is not enough marketing to schools. There is a lack of communication.

We are going to be meeting the Secretary of State on 19 January to talk through issues and solutions, but there is serious talk going on at the moment about co-creating a new organisation, a not-for-profit entity, which could potentially take over the running of the National Tutoring Programme from 1 September 2022, and we look forward to talking about that with the Secretary of State.

Professor Francis: I can only comment on the last year of the National Tutoring Programme that we were involved with. Of course, we know a lot about what good tutoring looks like and how that can help support recovery. We learnt a great deal from the first year in terms of the need to communicate effectively with schools and, of course, dealing with the capacity challenges that were facing the entire sector last year. It is imperative that the tuition provision, if it is to support recovery effectively, remains evidence led and balances autonomy for schools with that evidence about effective practice.

Q5 **Chair:** David, just before I come on to you, I wanted to also ask about regional disparities of the programme. Your "Education recovery and resilience in England" phase 2 report suggested that there was a marked disparity in take-up of the NTP between the north, with 50% of schools, and the south, with upwards of 96% of schools. What challenges would you say exist with respect to offering tutoring in the north of England? Do you think the creation of the school-led tutoring strand of the NTP is an effective solution to ensuring that pupils in areas with a lower take-up of the NTP will have access to quality tuition?

David Laws: I certainly think that the school-led strand helps to reduce some of the risks that there would be if you were only relying on the NTP and its delivery mechanism. I think that has generally been welcomed in schools. You are right to say, Chair, that our report on learning loss has identified much greater problems with learning loss in the north of the country and the Midlands—almost the opposite of what the Government would want to see in terms of the levelling-up agenda.

It is interesting to speculate as to why the take-up may have been less in the north and north-east. We have certainly heard some anecdotal reports that the supply of tutoring was more constricted in those areas and that there was a lower ability by schools to engage and take up that offer, but we have not completed any other research of our own that would indicate other drivers that may explain the relatively low take-up in the north and north-east compared with the south of the country.

Q6 **Chair:** As well as the north and south, is there a disparity between cities

and towns?

David Laws: As you know, we have used the Renaissance Learning assessment data to report to the Department on a termly basis on learning loss and we have a very large sample, which is also linked to the national pupil database. That allows us to look not only at the national averages of learning loss, but at things like regional learning loss, learning loss by disadvantage characteristic, and learning loss by disadvantaged area as well as pupils.

What we are not able to do due to sample size is robustly measure whether there is a town versus city versus rural aspect to this. What we see is that the north and the Midlands are doing worse than the south and disadvantaged pupils are doing worse than non-disadvantaged pupils, but very notably all pupils in more disadvantaged areas have a high likelihood of suffering severe learning loss. It is not only poor children; it is non-poor children in disadvantaged areas.

Q7 **Chair:** Becky, could I ask you and then perhaps Nick how many high-quality tutoring providers exist in each region of England? I know you indicated that you wanted to answer the first part as well.

Professor Francis: Yes, thanks for that. I was just thinking about the points about uptake in different regions. In the first year, our experience was that some regional areas were much more familiar with tutoring than others. With some areas, you were really building on what was already in place and existing practice. In other areas, you were going from a standing start and that was more representative of the north. Then, of course, that was compounded by inequalities with capacity from the prevalence of the pandemic in different areas. Some regions were much more affected than others.

You can see evidence of this in the south-west, where we had very high uptake in that first year, even though they did not have extensive experience with schools using tuition, but they were much less affected by the pandemic in that first year. There were some patterns in that regard.

Sorry, what was the second question?

Chair: How many high-quality tutoring providers are there in each region?

Professor Francis: I am not able to tell you the answer to that, sorry. I do not have the detail in front of me. Certainly, in the first year we were proud of the fact that we managed to reach every postcode. That, of course, was part of the original design: selecting 33 high-quality providers that were able to meet our criteria, showing an evidence-led approach but also having that national reach to be able to offer that provision right across the country.

Q8 **Chair:** David, could you set out how you see whether or not the catch-up

programme is reaching disadvantaged pupils or not, and what the problems are?

David Laws: Yes, we are able to measure how disadvantaged pupils are doing so far, so we can see all of the interventions that are being applied and whether they are successful. We can certainly see that, so far, there is no evidence of being successful in holding the disadvantage gap at the level it was pre-pandemic, which is unsurprising, but we do not have a counterfactual where we can measure what the impact is of the National Tutoring Programme itself.

What would be immensely helpful is, as the programme matures and develops, to be able to get more information from the Department and the provider on which areas are getting the programme and the extent to which it is targeted at disadvantaged youngsters and those who are in disadvantaged areas. Then it will be easy to track the success against those metrics. At the moment, we cannot link access to the National Tutoring Programme to individual results.

Q9 **Chair:** The National Audit Office suggested that the NTP may not be reaching the most disadvantaged children, and the figures from July suggest that 46% of schools enrolled on the NTP have a greater than average percentage of pupils receiving pupil premium funding and less than half of pupils tutored by tuition partners were in receipt of the pupil premium. Nick, why is the NTP not reaching the most disadvantaged children according to the figures I have just cited?

Nick Bent: In year 1, the EEF and the other organisations that created the NTP from scratch and ran it did an absolutely brilliant job. There wasn't a target last year for the percentage of pupils taking part who should have been pupil premium. I think 46% is low but is not unexpected, particularly given that the question of which children needed support got a lot more complex because of the impact of the pandemic. This year there is a target: 65% of all the pupils who are receiving tutoring through the tuition partners pillar of the NTP should be pupil premium. That is baked into Randstad's contract with the DfE.

I know that you, Chair, and others are trying to get some of these numbers out of the DfE about how delivery is going so far this academic year. We have not seen any statistics on that yet. At the Tutor Trust we are above that target. We are currently at 67% pupil premium. We are having our busiest ever autumn term. We are well ahead of target in terms of the number of pupils that we are serving.

Q10 **Chair:** What more could be done to ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from the National Tutoring Programme?

Nick Bent: It again comes down to the DfE and Randstad's management of the programme. One big area of weakness is marketing to schools. It has not been extensive or effective enough, which is why I think the take-up is so low across the country at the moment. We have been

collaborating closely with Randstad. I have done a couple of school webinars with them, but there have been webinars for whole regions of the country where literally only a dozen schools have been present. There was one for Greater London recently and one for the south-west of England, with literally only a dozen schools on each call. A lot more needs to be done around marketing.

Q11 **Chair:** Becky and David, what more can be done to ensure that the NTP catch-up programme reaches pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds? To me that is the single most important purpose of the whole catch-up. We know that disadvantaged children learned the least during lockdown. If it is only reaching half, to me it does not seem to be doing what it says on the tin.

Professor Francis: In terms of policy, I think that the Government are on the right track with this much higher target now and an articulated target for uptake among pupil premium pupils. The question, of course, as Nick was saying, is whether that target can be met, but the request now is for schools to target to pupil premium pupils. The challenge there is about a nice balance with school autonomy and schools knowing which kids are most in need of tutoring, rather than it simply being designated for its own sake. I think the balance is in the right place now and the question is whether the numbers can be achieved.

David Laws: I have three quick points. First, we need to make sure that there is the demand there in the areas and from the schools that really need it. We need to make sure that the awareness is there in those schools. There is some anecdotal evidence that there may be differences between schools and their understanding of the programme and their inclination to take it up.

Secondly, there is the supply point. There was some early anecdotal evidence in some parts of the country that it was more difficult to get the tutoring than in other parts of the country where traditionally there has been a greater supply of tutors. We have to make sure that the availability is consistent across the country.

The third point about targeting is just to come back to emphasise that, although it should be focused on disadvantage and on learning loss, it will not always be the case that the children on free school meals and the pupil premium are furthest behind. The research that we published in October for the Department for Education showed, for example, that if you are a poor child but in a low disadvantaged area, then in primary maths you are about 1.8 months behind. If you are a non-poor child in a disadvantaged area, then you are 2.5 months behind.

In the targeting of this, we must not miss the fact that we not only need to target the pupil premium and free school meal children; there needs to be a regional and local element to the targeting to recognise that those young people who are not categorised as poor and are not in receipt of

the pupil premium but who are in areas deeply impacted by Covid cannot afford to miss out, otherwise we could be targeting it quite badly.

Q12 **Chair:** Finally, to what extent are the schools from the most disadvantaged areas struggling to take up the NTP because they do not have enough money to pay for the rest of the costs of the tutoring? Could a tapered subsidy rate affect access to tutoring in the long term?

Nick Bent: Yes, money is clearly a factor here, along with some of the problems around this digital hub that Randstad has created that a lot of schools have found incredibly frustrating and off-putting. We know in the north of England, where there are very high concentrations of deprivation, that even pre-pandemic, lots of schools had very high deficits. They have huge extra costs because of the communities that they serve, and those costs are not fully covered by things like the pupil premium or the extra recovery premium money and the NTP investment, which are all very welcome. The Government are doing the right things on those investments.

The Tutor Trust itself, as a charity, does a lot of fundraising with philanthropists and we are topping up the subsidies that the Government are offering to some schools in the north so that there is no financial barrier to the kids who really need tutoring getting a fantastic tutor, but there are limits to what we as individual charities can do. Certainly, the tapering off of those subsidies is a real concern.

Q13 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I want to ask about the age of children. You said that you have measured levels of attainment and learning loss by area, by disadvantage and by various different characteristics. I am particularly concerned about young children because while parents, to an extent, can sit and work from home alongside an older child, particularly those in reception and year 1 require quite a lot of parental attention and intervention continuously. Many working parents would not have been able to juggle that very easily. Do you have any information on how learning loss is different for the younger children?

David Laws: The project that we have done with Renaissance Learning looks at all of the year groups across primary and it looks at key stage 3, but sadly we and no other research organisation can go beyond key stage 3. We do not have that type of data that we can look at.

Dr Caroline Johnson: I am talking about stage 1, sorry—the youngest children.

David Laws: Yes. We do not see very big differences in our research project by year group within primary, although there was some research carried out by another organisation, which I think was published a few months ago, which showed, as you are suggesting, that the very youngest of the primary cohort might have been more impacted. We have not seen a particularly dramatic difference in that in our data.

What we have seen in our data that is noteworthy is in reading and maths, the primary cohort have made relatively good progress in catching up over the period of the pandemic. They have reduced the learning losses that we measured in the autumn term of last year. We have seen far less catch-up in the secondary school sector where we have data for reading. Particularly worryingly, we have seen disadvantaged youngsters in secondary schools in the key stage 3 phase further behind in the summer term of this year than they were in 2020.

Your hunch is a very interesting one and it would repay further work and scrutiny as to whether those very young children are struggling more at home. The big difference that we have seen so far has not so much been between different parts of the primary school sector; it has been the less effective catch-up in the secondary sector compared with the primary.

Q14 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** The other group that I wanted to ask about is those children who move around frequently, particularly children who have military families and have moved about, perhaps having been reposted during the pandemic, maybe even more than once. Do you have any information on how those children are proceeding with catch-up and whether they are attracting more tutoring?

David Laws: We sadly do not have any data that go down right to that level for those types of pupil groups. There simply would not be the data to connect those types of individuals to the data we are collecting, and the sample sizes would also be very small.

I do think you are highlighting a very important point, which is that among the cohorts of young people that we can look at and their characteristics, we can look at averages where you have very big groups. We cannot so easily look at children who are moving around the country or the very large number of children who appear to have left the formal school system to go into home education, where the types of assessments that we are tracking through our work with Renaissance Learning are simply not taking place.

One big concern around the pandemic and its impact is whether there are pupil groups, or groups of pupils, who we are simply not capturing in the measures of learning loss that we have, and whether they could be seeing much larger learning losses. If you break down the learning losses we see, take away from the national averages and look at areas of deprivation being in the north or the Midlands or whatever, you can find learning losses that may be five or six times the average for the rest of the country.

This issue of the unequal distribution of costs is important, and trying to identify those particularly vulnerable groups is very important. Those groups are going to be helped not only potentially by what goes on in schools, but also by what other services outside the school gate can do within their budgetary capacity to support those children.

Q15 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** You talked about costs as well. Obviously, it is important to taxpayers, the Government and the children that we see that the tutoring programme works and is good value for money. You have said that you measured the children over different areas, you have talked about different areas having more access to tutors than others, and you have talked about the change in learning loss over time. Can you extrapolate from that how effective the tutoring programme is?

David Laws: We cannot so far, based on the data that is available to us, because we cannot link the pupils who we are looking at from the Renaissance Learning data to those who have taken up the National Tutoring Programme. That data does not exist anywhere. We could, over time, see whether children in the more disadvantaged categories are catching up, which is certainly what you would expect if the National Tutoring Programme was working, but from the macro work we are doing we can't connect the learning loss with particular individual interventions. We need a more thorough evaluation at a pupil level of those pupils who are going through the tutoring programmes to see whether they catch up at a faster rate than similar pupils who are not getting the tutoring.

Some of that evaluation was core to the EEF thinking and hopefully it is still going on, even though the EEF is less involved in year 2. I think Becky would probably—

Q16 **Chair:** I am going to bring in Becky and Nick, but you said, as I understand it, that for secondary school pupils the catch-up programme is not improving their reading. Is that what you said just now?

David Laws: Yes, the data we have from secondary schools that are statistically meaningful are in reading rather than maths. In primary, we have both reading and maths. When we look at the secondary data, we see, for example, that in autumn of last year secondary school pupils were about one and a half months behind on average in their reading. That had only contracted that learning loss to 1.2 months by the summer of this year. Over almost a year, they had only caught up about 20% of the lost learning, which is much less than in primary.

More disturbing for us, and I think for the Department, were the data on disadvantaged youngsters. Those entitled to the pupil premium in secondary schools were just under two months behind in the autumn of last year—1.9 months—but they were 2.4 months behind in the summer of this year. Those disadvantaged pupils in secondary schools have gone backwards since 2020. I think that is one of the reasons why the Government have skewed the additional recovery moneys in the spending review more towards secondary-age students.

You will probably also know that the attendance data that has been coming out recently from the Government, and some very good reports by other research organisations like Education Datalab, show a very marked skew: it is the older children who are seeing more attendance problems. Secondary is worse than primary; year 11 is worse than year

7; disadvantaged is worse than advantaged; the north and Midlands are worse than the south. All of these inequalities are compounding and potentially secondary pupils could be more vulnerable if the attendance that they are able to have, including at the moment, is less than that in primary schools, which appears to be the case.

Chair: I will bring in the other witnesses who wanted to answer, but if you could also suggest why this is happening that would be helpful.

Professor Francis: Just to come back to the point about evaluation of the NTP, certainly the evaluation has been going on for year 1 and the NFER will be reporting on outcomes next year. The trouble, of course, is that with outcome data and so forth having been complexified by the Covid pandemic and the lack of baseline data, it is very important that evaluation continues.

Q17 **Ian Mearns:** If I may interrupt—I am sorry—we are talking about the NFER doing an evaluation, but the trouble with this is that we need to learn the lessons quickly in order to put things right. The normal timescales for an education research programme need to be concertinaed in order to get the results that we need to learn from the mistake or mistakes or to learn the lessons.

Professor Francis: That is a very fair point, Ian. As I say, the difficulties in being able to measure learning gain are genuine, particularly at speed, but to reassure you, the EEF did its own speedy lessons learnt evaluation of the programme last year and already has findings that have been fed back to the DfE. If you are interested to hear more, I can give you some detail there. I don't know if that is appropriate now.

Chair: Please give us some details.

Professor Francis: Some of the lessons that we learnt from year 1 of NTP delivery were, first of all, to keep evidence at the core of what you do, of course, but also clarity on the essential parts of the programme. What is flexible and what is not is very important.

Secondly, ensure that stakeholders are involved in the design. That is something that we have learnt from and would need to do better were we to do it again, having gone from that standing start. That is very important at the beginning, but also along the way to make the programme as useful as possible.

Thirdly, take a long-term view and support any delivery organisations to improve, even if the benefits of that are seen in the longer term. Next, manage expectations of what the programme can achieve, careful not to overclaim, and also make sure that the programme works alongside other initiatives in the sector.

Finally, again to reassure you all, data are key: defining the information that is vital to collect and then supporting delivery organisations to provide that and use it to feed back and improve delivery.

Q18 **Chair:** In response to the why, David set out some of the problems. Do you have an answer to the why, either of you?

Nick Bent: I wanted to reinforce what David was saying about the particular challenges of secondary schools. I think it is right that the Government in the spending review committed lots of extra money to the recovery premium, and that money is actually focused more on secondary schools than on primary schools. I think it is double funding for secondary schools compared to primary schools. I think lots of additional investment is needed on top of what has already been announced, but I think that was the right focus.

To answer Dr Johnson's questions about value for money and impacts on outcomes, the key reason why all of us who are front-line deliverers of the National Tutoring Programme desperately want the tuition partners pillar to be a success is that there is very strong quality control around who is able to provide that tuition. We have all been through very rigorous screening and assessment to allow us to deliver that tuition, so we desperately want it to be a success.

We also need to compare and contrast the tuition pillars offered to schools with the school-led tutoring grant scheme, which is meant to be double the size of tuition pillars this year. Tuition pillars is 524,000 pupils, although we hear from Randstad only 28,000 have been enrolled so far. School-led tutoring is meant to be a million pupils this year, and while the advantage of school-led tutoring is that it gives more freedom and flexibility, with more autonomy for schools about which tutors to use, there is not nearly as much quality control. It will be very interesting to see whether there are differences in impact and outcomes for the disadvantaged pupils that we are serving through the different schemes that the Government have offered.

Chair: Becky, did you want to respond to that or not?

Professor Francis: No, that is fine.

Q19 **Christian Wakeford:** David, to come back on one of the points you were making about defining learning loss and disadvantage, the variance between poorer pupils in affluent areas and vice versa, free school meals, pupil premium and so on, how would you define an individual as having severe learning loss in order to target resource in the best possible way? Would you assess that by algorithm or by doing further research? To what extent can we use that to say, "In the north the individual has isolated 11 times; that is learning loss. In the south-west, yes, you may be pupil premium in a relatively affluent area, but you have isolated once; therefore, it is not as severe"? Because while the quantum is more advantageous at the moment, it does need to be targeted to where it is needed.

David Laws: Yes, I think the point about targeting is incredibly important. I am sorry to repeat the point, but we are seeing big

differences between the way in which people are affected by the pandemic depending upon their characteristics. Targeting the money is very sensible and, although the Government have done a sensible thing in our view in shifting some funding in the spending review—putting some of the extra money towards secondary as opposed to primary because of the lack of catch-up—arguably they also need to get more money to disadvantaged areas, not just to disadvantaged pupils, because of my point that we are seeing big learning losses in disadvantaged communities as well as for poor children across the country.

In our recent report at the EPI on trying to deal with learning loss and catch-up, we suggested that the Government should look to target funding based on a mixture of additional money following the pupil premium but, also, area-based disadvantage. We calculated that that might end up giving five times as much funding to schools in some parts of the country as to schools in others.

Obviously, the Government could also target by pupil characteristic in the schools that have very high concentrations of SEND or special schools. Otherwise, it would be very difficult to do it at a pupil level. Obviously, the experience even with two schools down the road from each other in terms of Covid outbreaks and attendance problems could be so difficult that it would give the DfE an impossible task to try to accurately target funding to 23,500 schools. All we can do is look at the warning signs that are associated with big learning loss: less progress in secondary than primary, disadvantaged children doing worse, disadvantaged areas doing worse, the north and Midlands doing worse than the south. The Government can then try to target that funding as effectively as possible.

Things like the take-up of the NTP, to the extent that there is a school contribution that has to be made, will obviously be tougher in parts of the country that have big challenges and that are having to spread the money they have from the Government across a wider number of children. It could, as the tutoring requires a greater contribution from schools, impede those parts of the country that need the tutoring support most if they are not properly funded.

You will also know that the IFS published a report a week or so ago that looked at education funding over the last decade or so. It showed that there has been something of a shift of funding away from more disadvantaged schools to more advantaged schools over the last five years or so. That will also have made it relatively more difficult for some of those schools, in areas with very high persistent disadvantage, to cope with the effects of the pandemic. We would urge the Government to go on looking at the evidence on learning loss, figure out where it is taking place and go on targeting funding as is needed to those schools in parts of the country that are not succeeding in catching up. We would urge them not to assume that the moneys that have been allocated so far will necessarily be enough to do the job in all parts of the country.

Q20 **Ian Mearns:** I am fascinated by some of the answers that we have had so far. What I am getting a picture of is that because there was no target last year in terms of the delivery, therefore, the pupils who are receiving pupil premium were not the ones necessarily getting the tutoring around the country, and there has been this north-south divide that we have heard of. It seems to me there has been a drive by the delivery partners to get the numbers up and, in order to do that, they have had to use the low-hanging fruit in terms of which pupils in which schools they have gone to. Therefore, in terms of future distribution of resources, not only do we now need catch-up for lost learning; we need catch-up for lost catch-up because some schools have just missed out. Those pupils will be in double jeopardy if we do not get that right.

Becky, you talked about some areas of the country, in terms of the numbers of tutors and the tutoring that was available, starting from a zero position. How are we making sure that when we are getting tutors in those areas of the country, we are getting quality as well as quantity? Because those pupils are the ones who are going to need the quality in the greatest measure. There are a number of conundrums there, it seems to me. In those areas of the country that have not had a market in tutoring, who are the potential tutors? In many parts of the country, it seems to me that the potential tutors will be the same people who staff up supply agencies.

Professor Francis: I think the suggestion about low-hanging fruit might not be completely fair.

Ian Mearns: I was just throwing it out there, Becky—come on, for goodness' sake!

Professor Francis: To explain, it is teachers in schools who identify the children who are then provided for tutoring.

Q21 **Ian Mearns:** But there is an interesting element of that, particularly if we are going to concentrate money into the secondary sector. Is there not an incentive for schools to actually concentrate resources on their C/D borderlines?

Professor Francis: The grade 4, as it were?

Ian Mearns: Yes.

Professor Francis: I think that is a separate conversation. I think it is plausible. Many of those kids are working-class pupil premium pupils, of course, so, yes, that is an interesting point.

It is teachers who identify the pupils in need of tuition and, because the EEF's mission is to support the narrowing of the socioeconomic gap for attainment and that was really pivotal in the design of the National Tutoring Programme, we did frequently questionnaire both tuition providers and schools themselves about their allocation. We were always trying to encourage greater take-up of disadvantaged pupils for tuition.

The explanations coming back from schools about why they were allocating particular pupils and so on tended to be pretty plausible in the circumstances. They tended to be about choosing the most vulnerable pupils on the basis of their diagnostic testing and kids that had particularly fallen behind in the pandemic, which, first, were not necessarily pupil premium pupils all the time and, secondly, of course, they were making the point that many more pupils had fallen into the category of social disadvantage, but that there was a lag between them meeting those difficult circumstances and actually being categorised as such.

Schools very often had plausible explanations about their designation. Nevertheless, given our mission, we are supportive of the increased targeting that the Government are insisting on now. I think that also stands in relation to recovery efforts more broadly. At the beginning of the pandemic we saw, with the catch-up funding and so forth, that funding being just broadly available to all, whereas increasingly we see it has now been targeted, as we see through the recovery premium, on pupils in the most disadvantaged areas and conditions of need, very much in keeping with what David has been saying, supported by the data.

Nick Bent: To respond to Mr Wakeford's questions, I would agree with David that there is absolutely a case for further investment, including on area-based disadvantage. It is important to look at the opportunity areas and it would be great to get some figures from the DfE about what the take-up of the National Tutoring Programme is this year in the opportunity areas. We serve two of them, Bradford and Oldham. I would also commend to the Committee the work of Henri Murison and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership—

Ian Mearns: Are you just trying to wind me up, Nick?

Chair: He does not have one.

Ian Mearns: We do not have an opportunity area in the north-east of England.

Nick Bent: I am sorry, Mr Mearns, yes. You have Opportunity North East but that is not quite the same thing.

Ian Mearns: Not quite, no.

Nick Bent: I would also commend the work of Henri Murison and the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, which does cover the whole of the north of England. It has done some great work on the case for focusing money on persistently disadvantaged pupils, because that drives a lot of the attainment gap.

On your question, Mr Mearns, about the risk of double jeopardy, I think that is a real issue. While it would be good to hear from the Department

for Education what the current percentage of pupil premium pupils enrolled in the National Tutoring Programme is so far this term—because it has not shared those figures with us yet—the main problem we have is the low raw number of pupils who have been enrolled at all. The only figure we have seen from Randstad is that it has enrolled 28,000 pupils. Its target this year for tuition partners is 524,000 pupils. We are nearly one full term into this academic year. It is at 5% of its target. It has 95% of its target yet to meet. We all desperately want this programme to be a success, but there is some serious remedial action that the Department and Randstad need to take to get us to that—

Ian Mearns: It has some catch-up to do.

Nick Bent: Indeed, and we are willing to help with that. We are doing everything we can to work collaboratively with Randstad and the DfE to get everything back on track.

Chair: I will just bring Caroline in on her point and then Miriam.

Q22 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I want to come on to the point about the attainment gap versus the lost learning gap. Presumably, these are cumulative. In theory, the National Tutoring Programme offers children who are suffering from both, essentially, the opportunity not just to catch up with their learning loss from the pandemic but to narrow of the attainment gap, too. Have you seen any evidence in children who have gone through your programme and the National Tutoring Programme of a negative learning loss—that is, a learning gain relative to where they might have been otherwise?

David Laws: In our research, we cannot tie our data to children who are on the NTP. What we can tell you is roughly what has happened to the disadvantaged attainment gap at an overall level. What we have seen in primary education, in the maths and reading data, indicates that about a third of the improvement in the attainment gap over the last decade—so about a third of the progress that we have made over that time—has been lost over the period of the pandemic.

Our data do not allow us to give an estimate of what has happened to the disadvantage gap with the same degree of robustness for the secondary sector, but if you consider the fact that secondary school disadvantaged pupils are now further behind in reading than they were in the autumn of 2020—in other words, they have gone backwards over this period of time—whereas the non-poor secondary children have fared rather better, our fear is that at secondary level the disadvantage gap may have given up a much greater share of the gains made over the last decade.

I would also just pick up, if I may, on this point that Nick raised about persistent disadvantage. In our annual report last year, we looked at the disadvantage gap, not just by poor children versus the rest—pupil premium versus the rest of the pupil population—where the gap is about 18 months at age 16 and it has stopped shrinking over the last couple of

years, even before the pandemic. What we also did was to look at all the poor children and at how the gap varied between those children who had only been in poverty for a short period of their time in education and those who were persistently poor, so they had been there between 80% and 100% of their time in education. We found that there was an absolutely enormous difference in the gap for these two types of poor children. The most persistently poor children are almost two years behind at age 16, compared to about a year for the least persistently poor children. That is a massive difference, not just between poor and non-poor, but about poor and deeply poor.

It is also probably one of the reasons why places like the north-east and other parts of the country that have very high levels of persistent poverty look like they are doing even more badly on the disadvantage gap, because they have a much more difficult cohort of children to work with. On that persistent disadvantage gap for those most persistently poor children, even before the pandemic there had been no progress made over the previous decade. Governments have been succeeding in shrinking the gap through improving the lot of the children who are less persistently disadvantaged, which is still well worth doing, but it shows that we have a particular challenge with the most persistently disadvantaged.

Professor Francis: Just to build on some of those points, I think it is interesting to note that some of the research on learning loss and the disadvantage gaps suggests that disadvantaged pupils in certain groups and certain subjects have recovered more quickly than their non-disadvantaged peers. It is important to note that, as we have been saying, disadvantaged pupils suffered more from the learning loss originally, which those recovery gains do not counterbalance. It shows that schools are making great progress in some areas but, nevertheless, more sustained resource continues to be needed.

Thinking about the persistent disadvantaged gap and the point that, of course, this is something that children enter the early years in the school system with, I just want to come back to your earlier question about the early years. Our recent study that we commissioned with the NFER, looking at key stage 1 pupils and comparing results from 2020 and the spring and summer terms of 2021 with a representative prior cohort, found that there had been little progress for year 1 pupils in reading. Attainment in reading was on average three months lower in both spring and summer 2021 than pre-Covid levels. While year 1 pupils were about three months behind previous cohorts in maths in spring 2021, the Covid gap was estimated to be just one month in summer 2021, suggesting that so far those efforts to support education recovery have been effective in maths in those early stages of primary.

We have also found in our initial work on the earliest years that early communication and language has been particularly affected. This is what practitioners are seeing. Therefore, that was what underpinned our

support with the Government to roll out the Nuffield Early Language Intervention. Obviously, that only addresses reception-age years, but I think more attention to the early years is well evidenced both to be very productive in any case but particularly so perhaps during the pandemic.

Q23 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** When you just said that among secondary students, some areas and some subjects were improving much more quickly, do we understand why? It is understanding why that helps to spread that out.

Professor Francis: Sorry, I was talking about year 1 there. Again, we are looking at broad-scale data, but I think that if we are to map with both resource across geography and in terms of school circumstances, we would be likely to see some patterns there.

In terms of the evidence, the Education Endowment Foundation's encouragement, drawing on our prior evidence, is always to take a threefold approach: focusing on high-quality teaching, which we know makes the biggest difference overall; drawing on evidence-based interventions—tutoring is obviously included as one of those; and thirdly, thinking about wide-scale programmes that ensure that kids are ready to learn, whether that is about their mental health and wellbeing, their attendance at school, and so on. Again, I think that broad-scale evidence has particular salience during the pandemic.

Q24 **Miriam Cates:** I am quite interested in the north-south divide. I represent a constituency in Yorkshire. Anecdotally, what I have heard from schools is that they are quite sceptical about the benefits of bringing in outside adults to tutor their children. They believe that pupils respond better to adults they know, so they have invested a lot of their money in increasing onsite intervention from staff who are already known. Also, which I completely understand, they believe that online interactions are just not as beneficial as face to face. Certainly, in the early days, in terms of the geographical availability of tutors and the situation with the pandemic, for a lot of these schools the only thing that was on offer was Zoom, and they just did not think that would benefit their children.

How do we counter this perception that tutoring is not necessarily for "a school like us"? Or would it be better to invest in training existing school staff to meet this quality control that you are talking about, to become onsite tutors as a speciality, therefore ticking all the boxes that the heads are concerned about?

Nick Bent: Those are great questions, yes. I think it is absolutely right that schools should make the decisions about what sort of supplementary support they give to their pupils, whether it is tutoring or other interventions, and the school-led tutoring programme, which the Government were absolutely right to introduce, does give that freedom and flexibility to schools.

That said, some schools do struggle to figure out who are the best tutors to use if they want to use external providers. We do not have an

established tutoring profession in this country. There are no kitemarks or benchmarks. There is very little information out there for schools or parents about what good quality and safe tutoring looks like.

We also know that in some of the schools that are under the most pressure serving the toughest communities, those very hardworking teachers, school leaders and TAs often have the least spare time to do the one-to-one tutoring or small group tutoring themselves, and they do want to look to external providers. I know a lot of them would prefer to work with a not-for-profit provider, a charity like the Tutor Trust, in the local area that is aligned with their ethos and values to partner with. Absolutely, they prefer face-to-face tutoring rather than online. Certainly, 95% of the work that the Tutor Trust does across the north of England is face to face.

I do think that almost every school in the country would benefit from having some sort of external partnership to provide extra support. The National Tutoring Programme has not yet won the hearts and minds of school leaders. I think that is one of the real reputational problems that the Department and Randstad are wrestling with at the moment. We have to put that right, because at the moment lots of schools are being put off the National Tutoring Programme when, actually, I would urge them to explore it and to try to make it work for them, despite the problems.

Professor Francis: Yes, the National Tutoring Programme was all about adding capacity and expertise and, as I have said, the evidence is very secure that tutoring, whether that is supplied by well qualified classroom teachers or from external, well qualified people, is very beneficial. I think that that added resource of capacity and expertise remains fundamental.

I do not think there is strong evidence on the response of pupils to internal or external providers, but I would speculate that that additional social capital that can be gained by interacting with outside agents can be very beneficial to pupils. Of course, as Nick said, school staff know their pupils best and are able to respond in that way. I think it is about having a balanced set of opportunities.

What we must not see and what we must avoid is a sort of race to the bottom, where it is socially disadvantaged pupils who get the lowest quality support, particularly if kids are being taken out of the classroom, because, ultimately, it is high-quality teaching and tuition that makes the biggest impact.

David Laws: I agree with all of Becky's points. There is no reason in theory why you could not devise a good school-based tutoring route. Ideally, we need to monitor the impact of both the external tutoring and what is happening in school.

One of our research fellows at the EPI wrote a note in September about both the extended day and some of the evidence on tutoring. His

conclusion in a sentence on tutoring was that to be effective the evidence shows that tutoring, "needs to be delivered by staff with high levels of training and linked strongly to existing classes and teaching." You could do that either from within a school or outside a school. What you must not do is end up either in school or outside school using staff who do not have those skills and abilities, because if you default either externally or internally, just as a matter of philosophy, and you end up with not very good people, you are probably not going to end up with very good results.

Q25 **Chair:** Some tutoring companies use graduate trainees, for example. You would not be in favour of that, presumably?

David Laws: If those graduates have subject expertise in the areas that they are teaching in, if they have adequate training and if it is demonstrated that they can make an impact, they could be as effective as some other groups of individuals who could be used for tutoring. It has to be based on people's skills and abilities and the link to what the student is doing in school.

Q26 **Chair:** Should there be a kitemark or benchmark on these tutoring programmes to ensure their long-term effectiveness?

David Laws: Yes. I think the model that the EEF was pursuing—and hopefully will be taken forward in the future—will ensure that, as far as the NTP is concerned, the only people who are allowed to access public funding to deliver it are people who are delivering a quality solution. They may have very different business models but they ought to be shown and evaluated to be having impact. If not, then they ought not to be getting the public funding.

Professor Francis: Thank you, David. I was simply going to point out that the National Tutoring Programme was designed on this basis that we held tutoring provider applicants to account in terms of our criteria for entry into the programme. Many of those points that we have been discussing—prior qualifications, being able to liaise effectively with the classroom teacher and so forth—were among the criteria along with, of course, points about organisation, safeguarding and so forth. Hopefully, that will continue.

Chair: Nick, in a genuine nutshell, please.

Nick Bent: In a nutshell, I support the points that Becky and David have made. I think the Government should be looking seriously, as part of the positive legacy from the National Tutoring Programme, to create a proper tutoring profession in this country that is high quality, that is safe and that gives basic good information to tutoring consumers—whether that is school leaders or parents—so that they are only getting really good tutors, because that just does not exist in this county at the moment.

Chair: Miriam, did you want to come back?

Miriam Cates: No, thank you.

Q27 **Apsana Begum:** Good morning, panel. I have a few questions around mental health provision. I want to begin by asking you whether you think more needs to be done right now in terms of mental health recovery for school children, and how that should be balanced against investment in academic recovery. I will start with Nick.

Nick Bent: There was a lot of debate about this last year when lockdown first hit, and I think some of the debate was unhelpfully polarised: is it about academic catch-up or is it about looking after the wellbeing and mental health of pupils? It absolutely needs to be both. Certainly, our tutors are fantastic young people. They are mostly undergraduates and, as well as being very good academic tutors, they are also wonderful mentors, supporters and champions of these young people. They definitely boost their self-confidence and their enjoyment of learning. They are another great role model in the lives of these young people and they have a different sort of working relationship with the pupils than maybe their teachers or TAs do.

I do think that tutors can play a great role in supporting both wellbeing and mental good health. In Greater Manchester we work closely with a fantastic project called Be Well, which I think is the largest survey and piece of work on secondary school wellbeing and mental health in the whole country. We are part of a coalition supporting that. We partner with a charity called TLC: Talk, Listen, Change, and also with the Prince's Trust in Greater Manchester to offer life skills support and counselling to pupils as well as academic tutoring, so it can be both.

Professor Francis: EEF's focus, of course, is on learning outcomes in teaching and learning, but we also do highlight the importance of considering more holistic learning opportunities through our resources. I have already mentioned our tiered model that we have used to support guidance for pupil premium and recovery spending. Schools are encouraged to think about wider strategies as well as, as I have said, high-quality teaching and evidence-based interventions.

Those approaches can complement a school's provision for pupils' physical and mental health and can help to ensure that academic support is complemented by wider pastoral care. I think there are now some really great resources out there from, for example, the Anna Freud Centre and so forth.

Q28 **Apsana Begum:** We had a report recently about left behind pupils and the Department responded by saying that the Government would be delivering mental health support teams to 20% to 25% of pupils in England a year early in 2022 and around 35% of pupils in England by 2023. Do you think they are on track?

Professor Francis: I do not know about where they are up to in that programme. As I have said, I think the evidence is clear that kids have to

be ready to learn and mental health, of course, is an important pillar in that regard.

David Laws: From our perspective, it is a massively important issue. As you know, there were major problems for young people even before the pandemic. The prevalence of mental health conditions was rising, particularly for teenage girls where the proportion who are affected by mental health issues in the later teenage years is really worrying. All of the evidence and surveys that we have seen since the pandemic started have shown that, unsurprisingly, mental health and wellbeing has become worse for students on average over that period of time.

I suppose that matters for two reasons. First, we can see that there are strong long-term links between mental health and wellbeing and how people do in life—not just their attainment in school, but also their chances of being in employment, of getting a decent level of pay and so forth. We are also, obviously, concerned about the non-academic outcomes anyway.

I have a couple of very brief thoughts on policy. First, as you said, the Government are rolling out this additional provision in schools. I am not sure whether it is on track or not, but I think many people would like to see the pace of it accelerated—the Government plans accelerated—so that more schools have that level of mental health support inside.

Secondly, a lot of the services that young people rely upon when they have mental health problems are not funded through the school but through local authorities and other groups outside the school gate. We know that there have been a lot of budget pressures on those services over the years, so making sure that those are properly supported is important. Then the other issue is that the problems around wellbeing and mental health are another reason why extended day type activities could be considered, because some of those extended activities could have an academic benefit but some could have a really important wellbeing and social benefit for students.

Chair: I am very glad you said that. We are going to come on to that in a bit.

Q29 **Apsana Begum:** Yes, that was actually my next question about extending the school day. There has been a lot of discussion about that up and down the country, and some focus on concentrating any extended time on academic learning. We on the Committee have talked a lot about all the other activities that would also help and aid recovery and people managing their mental health.

There is some evidence to suggest a positive relationship between the quantity of instructional time and outcomes across educational phases. I just want to get a sense from your different organisations of how you see that any extra time would help with mental health outcomes.

Professor Francis: The devil is in the detail when it comes to additional school time, because it absolutely depends on what schools are then using that extra time for, whether it is to deal with mental health issues or otherwise.

Our evidence suggests that extended time can be an effective lever in improving learning and attainment outcomes, but it is also a game of diminishing returns. It is difficult to identify gains beyond a certain threshold of instructional teaching hours. We know that the UK school day is actually towards the longer end of the spectrum in comparison to other OECD countries, so that point about the devil being in the detail is crucial.

The evidence suggests that increasing instructional hours and extending the school day can lead to the widening of existing attainment gaps, including for social and economic disadvantage. Again, the content is all important. It is about how change is implemented, and about schools and teachers purposefully electing to extend the school day to provide specific support that addresses pupil needs. Of course, that might include dealing with mental health and wellbeing as well as academic outcomes. That seems to be what impacts the interventions underpinning the teaching and learning toolkits indicator of three-month progress, so that is more likely to be impactful, I think, than a nationwide statutory increase without a clear plan for how that would enhance pupils' learning experiences at school.

Apsana Begum: Nick, do you want to come in?

Nick Bent: I do not have anything further to add. Thank you.

Q30 **Christian Wakeford:** In regards to delivering a longer school day, who do you think should actually be responsible for that delivery? Factoring in staff workload and mitigating that so as not to overload teachers even more, but ensuring that it is enriching, fulfilling and tackling the mental health aspects that Apsana mentions—who should be responsible for that?

Professor Francis: That absolutely depends on the purpose and what the purpose is. Then you think about which professionals are needed to deliver that. If it is about learning gain, it needs to be qualified teachers, whereas if it is about mental health and wellbeing and so forth, that may need other professionals. We need to think very carefully—more carefully than I think has happened to date in this debate—about what the purpose of that extra time is.

Q31 **Chair:** Why does it have to be an either/or?

Professor Francis: No, it could be all, but my point is that in order to provide it, it really depends on what that mission is. If it is simply extra school, obviously you need qualified teachers supporting that.

Q32 **Christian Wakeford:** In essence, we ask what we want the outcome to

be and work backwards?

Professor Francis: Exactly.

Q33 **Chair:** Just on the longer school day, the Centre for Social Justice said that 71% of schools reported that an extended school day helped to engage with disadvantaged families. There is some evidence from the Department to suggest it might be good. I think that you yourself said that an extended school day need not be delivered by schools and teaching staff but could be delivered by voluntary and charitable organisations. There is other evidence out there from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and elsewhere to suggest that having extracurricular activities does improve not just mental health but educational attainment. When we talk about an extended school day for mental health, what we are talking about is extracurricular activities like sport, drama and music, which has a beneficial effect on both.

David, if I can start with you: is it your view that if you had such extracurricular activities, it would have a virtuous circle of improving both mental health and educational attainment and, if so, how should it work in practice? Should it be an extra hour a day, two hours, half an hour in the morning? What should it be?

David Laws: I think Becky's point again is crucial. You have to start off by deciding what you want to achieve. Sometimes people say that extended school days are not showing the impact they want, but the extended activities may relate to sport and wellbeing rather than academic attainment, so you have to measure what you are trying to achieve. For example, there is some evidence that students who do more physical activities and sport have better mental health and wellbeing. If you are trying to drive—

Chair: Academic attainment as well.

David Laws: Yes, although I think that the effects of schemes that are aimed at sport and general activities are more likely to have an impact on wellbeing and mental health than on attainment. They could have some attainment impacts. We published a note on this. It was in the Luke Sibieta note that commented on tutoring, which looked at the evidence from around the world of extended day activities and particularly looked at those that were aiming to deliver better progress and attainment. It showed that there were quite a lot of examples in a variety of countries of very effective schemes, but there were also other schemes in other countries that had been ineffective.

When you looked at the characteristics around this, what you saw was that those schemes that were firmly focused on attainment, had well-qualified teachers and were closely tied into the types of academic areas that the school was already covering were quite effective and the evidence was quite strong. It was schemes that were not very well specified or that were trying to deliver academic catch-up using low-

quality professional resources that were the types of schemes where the value for money was not very good.

I think you have to decide whether you are doing this for mental health reasons or academic reasons. You need a different delivery mechanism depending upon which it is. You could, of course—as you said, Chair—seek to do both and use a blend of qualified teaching staff and other individuals, either existing staff or voluntary groups, to do some of the sport and other activities. I think there are already good examples in this country of schools that have an extended day that operate it perfectly happily without the Government so far having said it was either a good idea or a bad idea.

Sometimes that is non-academic activities that they use the extra time for, but quite often it is aimed at catch-up for some of the most disadvantaged pupils, who often have a very bad family environment to go back to and who benefit sometimes from the stability and support that they can get at the end of the school day.

Q34 **Ian Mearns:** David, is that scalable in terms of delivery? It may well be that local voluntary organisations are involved in a school or a couple of schools in a particular area, but is it scalable and able to be replicated across the whole of the school estate?

David Laws: If it is aimed at attainment, it certainly would not be scalable if you were simply relying upon voluntary groups. I think you have to have professional and properly trained staff if it is academic. Whether it is scalable across an entire school system very rapidly is then an interesting question. Becky will tell you—with her EEF hat on—that often she will see an effective intervention in 10 schools but when it is taken to 1,000 suddenly the effect tapers off, unsurprisingly.

I think a challenge around the recovery plan that Kevan Collins was advocating was: if there had been an extended school day, how would it have been phased in? if you tried to do it all overnight, with existing resources, with schools implementing it in a very varied quality way, you might not get a big impact. If you pilot it in a limited number of schools, if you evaluate it properly and if you support those schools with evidence from the schools that are already doing this successfully, I think it could be more impactful. If you suddenly did it overnight in 23,500 schools, I think there would be a risk of quite a lot of deadweight, as Becky was suggesting.

Q35 **Kate Osborne:** Good morning, panel. I think we have all been concerned about the loss of learning through Covid over the last 18 months, getting on for two years now. There is now obvious concern around the new variant and the possible effect that that might have on schools. The Department has recently published new guidance for schools, but what should the Department be doing to improve pupil attendance, particularly in light of these changes to guidance on Covid safety measures, Becky?

Professor Francis: We think attendance is very important. Ensuring that kids attend school could even be more beneficial than some of the discussions that we have just been having about additional time, I think, because clearly some kids are missing out and it is often socially disadvantaged or vulnerable pupils. We are currently conducting a rapid evidence review to look at the impact of attendance and to be able to support positive interventions going forward. We are also conducting a funding round in the new year in partnership with the Youth Endowment Foundation addressing this issue. We know from the evidence, as I say, that it makes a crucial difference to learning gain, particularly in the climate of the pandemic and the learning loss that pupils have experienced.

David Laws: Our latest report, which was sent to the DfE and published in October—the first time since we have been doing this project for them—linked pupil attendance to learning loss. It did show that there was a very dramatic effect, as you might expect. For pupils who were absent for a long period of time, their learning losses were multiples of pupils who had a much better attendance record, so it is a very big issue.

Some of that attendance is obviously linked to Covid spread and whatever the Government regulations are at the time, which there is a limited amount that we can do about. I know that many schools, particularly in the secondary phase, are concerned about pupils who have disconnected from education over the last year—

Q36 **Chair:** I am sorry to interject. In the House yesterday, I raised the Centre for Social Justice report that suggested there are—I have described them as "ghost children"—100,000 children who for the most part have not returned to school at all.

David Laws: Yes.

Chair: The catch-up programme presumably is not reaching them at all.

David Laws: Funds could be used by schools from the catch-up programme to try to target those young people, but I know that many schools in the most disadvantaged areas are worried about children who are both on the roll but have not attended for a long period of time, who are very difficult to support and bring back. Of course, the chief inspector has highlighted the big increase in home-educated children over the last year or so who might or might not be getting a good education. Having the extra resources for the most disadvantaged schools to do the intensive work to engage with the pupils and the parents and bring them back in, potentially having the types of activities that we have been talking about that are focused on wellbeing and sport—things that might motivate young people who are less motivated by academic—could be important.

The other important thing about attendance is that this is, sadly, not just a pupil issue but a staff issue, and it has quite a profound impact in some

schools. The schools with very high staff attendance problems are having to use a lot of their catch-up funding for their supply cover. It is eating into money that they could be using to help young people catch up. There is an argument for additional support for schools that have particularly acute staff problems with attendance. The Government have a bit of a scheme on that at the moment, but whether it could be more generous is something that might be worth considering.

Q37 **Kate Osborne:** What can we learn from good practice and the experience of education recovery programmes in other countries? We should bear in mind—you have just touched on this, David—the level of catch-up spending in the UK: currently it is around £400 per pupil in Wales, £310 in England and £230 in Scotland and Northern Ireland. That compares with the Netherlands, where catch-up represents around £2,100 per pupil across three years, and the US, where it is around £1,800. How key are education catch-up spending levels in this?

Professor Francis: You mentioned the Netherlands there. We are particularly interested in the Dutch model, not least because of their foregrounding of evidence in their recovery programme, including using the EEF teaching and learning toolkit at the heart of that. The Dutch approach gives funding directly to school boards, who then work with the schools in their region to design recovery plans, and schools are expected to go through a number of steps to successfully plan, implement and then monitor their strategy. They use that diagnostic mapping approach and then think about the evidence playing a critical part in a multi-year strategy agreed between the school and the school board. They use a menu of evidence-based approaches and interventions, drawing very much on our teaching and learning toolkit to support that. It has been great to see evidence-led programmes across the world, including to some extent in the United States and in other nations as well.

Clearly, the amount of financial support is significant here. What is clear as well, based on the experience and the evidence to date, is that that is also sustained. It is great to see the ongoing support that has come through the latest spending review, for example, but that will be clearly needed for some time, given the extent of the learning gaps that we have been discussing already in this session.

Q38 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I have a quick question about those children who are home-educated. Do we have any information about their learning loss? Has anyone measured that? What access to catch-up do they have and are they using?

David Laws: No, we have no evidence of their learning loss, just as we had no evidence of their learning position beforehand. We ought to be very worried about that category of child. I know it is something that the chief inspector has signposted her concerns about over the last year. We are thinking of doing some research on it.

Chair: Our Committee as well—we just published a report on it.

David Laws: Your Committee, yes. We are thinking of doing some work on it ourselves. The increase in the number of children who are being home-educated since the pandemic started is obviously very significant. They are a missing group of children who we know very little about. Trying to collect more information about whether they are getting an education in all cases and what has happened to them looks very important, although I understand that it is a tricky thing to do and a tricky thing to legislate on.

Q39 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** What access do these children have to the catch-up programme and are they using it?

David Laws: To my knowledge, they do not have access to the catch-up programme. I am thinking of all the different components of the catch-up programme, and it might have been, I suppose, that they could have taken up some of the summer provision. If you look at things like the catch-up premium, the recovery premium, NTP, extra money for teacher development, and the 16 to 19 funding, I cannot instantly think of any of that that will be percolating through to them.

Q40 **Ian Mearns:** I think I am right that I heard Amanda Spielman, HMCI, on the "Today" programme this morning reiterating her desire to see a register of youngsters educated at home. That is something that has been echoed by this Committee, so that is of interest. Of course, the numbers of youngsters being educated at home were already growing before Covid. There had been, I believe, a growth in numbers of youngsters who were being euphemistically educated at home due to off-rolling by secondary schools. That is a number that has percolated through the system.

Going back to the issue of attendance, isn't part of the problem the way in which schools talk about attendance and record attendance? Because 90% will be a pass in most exams, it sounds good if someone says, "Oh, I got 90%," but 90% in attendance terms is missing half a day a week. Therefore, in academic terms, it is just one day short of four weeks per academic year. Is there not something about the way in which we talk about the jargon when we are talking to parents about the importance of that? Also, from my experience as a governor, quite often the youngsters who are missing the most are also the ones who are late when they get there and the ones who abscond post-registration as well. There is a whole combination of problems quite often tied up in those individual kids and it is not just about attendance—it is a whole range of other potential welfare issues as well.

Nick Bent: That is a very good point, Mr Mearns. For our tutors, they cannot work with pupils and give them that boost to their attainment and self-confidence and enjoyment of learning unless they are in school to attend classes and tutoring sessions. We know from the research evidence that EEF produced when it put the Tutor Trust through a large-scale randomised control trial that pupils need a minimum of 12 hours of high-quality tutoring in one subject to shift the dial on outcomes. In our

discussions with schools about which pupils they put forward, we ask them to only put forward pupils with a high attendance rate at school because otherwise the programme is just not going to work.

Equally, the opportunity for a pupil to have a tutor can be a positive way to re-engage a pupil, their parents and the family. Lots of parents instinctively recognise that having a private tutor is a positive opportunity for their child. It may be something their family has always wanted for their kids and they have not been able to afford it, so if the school frames this in the right way it can give a fresh start to some of these pupils and help them to attend school more often and get the benefit of tutoring.

Q41 **Miriam Cates:** Picking up on that point, you were saying that when choosing students for catch-up tutoring and things like that, it is important to choose students who have good absence records. I completely understand for practical reasons why that is, but it strikes me that the students who need the catch-up and the intervention most are those who are missing the most school. Given that the epidemic of absence is not over and has no sign of being over because we persist with mass asymptomatic testing, which drives up absence rates automatically—I think 200,000 children were off school last week—how can we measure the effect of any programme, however good it is, while this epidemic of absence continues, given how uneven and unpredictable it is?

Nick Bent: It is a real conundrum and there is always a process of negotiation and conversation between us as a charity and schools. The schools are the experts. It is their school and their kids. If they can make a good case that a certain pupil should be part of our programmes, we will go along with that, regardless of whether they tick the boxes on disadvantage or attendance.

The Tutor Trust is a partner of the Centre for Social Justice. We absolutely support the work it is doing on very serious absences by certain groups of pupils. At the moment, its call for more attendance officers in certain schools to help address that is vital. Schools often just need another member of staff who can literally do the texting of parents, the knocking on doors, the hard work of engaging with families to make sure that kids get out of bed in the morning, get dressed and come to school, and feel comfortable coming into school and have a positive experience in school. We have to look at this holistically.

Q42 **Christian Wakeford:** To reinforce that point from Miriam, I completely understand the practicalities and the logistics of you wanting high attendance to maximise the benefit out of it, but without understanding the reasons behind some of the lack of attendance—whether that is health issues, isolation issues, home life, a child being looked after, and taking that wider holistic view, like you said—are we potentially downplaying some of that impact that it could have on the child by not allowing them access to the programme?

Nick Bent: That is a risk and I do not know the detailed figures about outcomes and interactions for pupils who are persistently absent. David and Becky might have better figures on that.

At the Tutor Trust, we bend over backwards to make sure that pupils who most need that fantastic support from a tutor get access to it. We have a specialist team of staff and tutors led by Jo Meredith, who work with looked-after children, pupils in alternative provision and pupils at risk of exclusion. Often those pupils have very high rates of absence but we stick with them. Sometimes tutors will go to their home; it might be a family home, it might be a foster carer's home, even a children's home, or we do the tutoring online to make sure that those pupils are getting the support that they need.

As I was saying earlier, they are not just getting academic support from our tutors. They are also getting mentoring, a new role model through the Prince's Trust, and in TLC: Talk, Listen, Change, they are getting life skills support, counselling and other therapeutic support as well.

Q43 **Chair:** On the 100,000 figure, it seems to me incredibly concerning. I want to get your genuine take on how the DfE is dealing with this. It said that it was appointing advisers to work with local authorities. I think *Schools Week* said it was just five advisers dealing with absent children. What should the programme and resources be to get these children back into school?

Professor Francis: This is an important topic and I am hoping that our rapid evidence review will make a contribution to our learning and enable us to move forward with productive interventions that have an impact. Of course, there are a multitude of different explanations for why we are seeing these patterns of absence at the moment. Some of them are to do with ongoing infection and disruption.

Chair: No, those ones you know about—the 200,000 who are sent home—but this is separate.

Professor Francis: Some of them are this trend towards home-schooling with parents, for whatever reason, thinking—

Chair: I am talking about the 100,000 who are off the rolls completely. People do not know, with most of these children, what is happening to them, and where they are.

Professor Francis: Clearly, developing an infrastructure to be able to trace these kids and be able—

Ian Mearns: A contact point would have worked on that.

Professor Francis: And be able to monitor them is urgently needed—that is right.

David Laws: There is only so much that schools can do about those on their rolls, but this group of students who are not on the rolls of individual schools clearly are a responsibility of the local area and the local authority. In the past, there probably has not been enough support for somebody in the centre to play that particular role. As the funding for local authority education services has been quite significantly reduced over the last decade, the capacity for authorities to do any of this type of work has been reduced. This is one of the areas where a greater clarity about the local authority role in education compared with the role of school groups, multi-academy and trusts and so forth would be very beneficial, otherwise some of these children fall between the cracks of a system that is neither fully academised nor the old local authority model.

Q44 **Chair:** Finally, if there was one thing you could do to improve the catch-up programme, make it fit for purpose and deal with some of the problems that you have highlighted, what would you do? I will start with Nick. I know you are not a fan of Randstad, clearly; we got that impression today.

Nick Bent: There are two things. First, in the short term we want to work with Randstad and the DfE to make a real success of this academic year. The DfE and Randstad are starting to listen a bit more and engage a bit more, and that is welcome.

Secondly, I do think the new Secretary of State needs to look seriously at the question of whether he should exercise his break clause in the contract with Randstad. There is an alternative option potentially available. The Fair Education Alliance has agreed to host conversations about an alternative not-for-profit provider to potentially take on the running of the whole National Tutoring Programme from 1 September 2022. There are charities like the Tutor Trust, Action Tutoring, Literacy Pirates, CoachBright, Equal Education and others who are willing to work with the Secretary of State to devise a potential alternative solution.

Professor Francis: I have talked already about the principle of a tiered approach to recovery, with the foregrounding of quality teaching always. I have also talked about the benefits of the trend with a more focused resourcing of recovery for socially disadvantaged pupils that we are seeing coming through since the spending review. I think that is also productive.

I have talked a little bit about the importance of that support being sustained, and the focus on supporting school autonomy and capacity in regard to that spending as well. Of course, the spending is evidence led. I would mention just two additional areas, one of which we have not touched on, and that is the importance of implementation in recovery spending. How approaches are implemented is likely to determine how effective they are in practice. Schools need support to be able to both make available, but then make best use of, available services to create that maximum impact. As I have said, using evidence, safeguarding, autonomy and providing system capacity are important in that regard.

The other area that we have touched on a little bit already is a focus on the early years. We are beginning to see that coming through, but there is so much more that can be done there. We know that the evidence shows that socioeconomic disadvantage gaps widen during the early years and that high-quality provision at that stage in a child's life can have a significant impact on future attainment and life chances. It is right that we see even greater activity there.

Chair: What would you do on early years?

Professor Francis: It would be a case of checking that funding is well spent but definitely thinking about an early years pupil premium, as the EPI has called for, of course, and thinking again about how to support high-quality practice and supporting practitioner quality in the early years.

David Laws: I agree with all of those comments, including about the importance of the early years. Our view is basically that the Government are focusing on the right policy instruments but the issue is quantum. As we discussed a moment ago, our catch-up programme is about a quarter of the size of that in the USA and the Netherlands per pupil. Although £4.9 billion over four years sounds quite a lot of money, when you think about that on an annual basis and what percentage increase it represents of the entire schools budget of almost £50 billion and all of the additional Covid-related costs, our big worry is whether the schools in the areas most impacted by Covid, with the pupils being most impacted, are being allocated enough money to do the catch-up job. Our concern is that they are not.

That is also about the way in which the money is targeted, not just the quantum. It has to go not just to pupil premium pupils but to those parts of the country that are most disadvantaged and are the furthest behind. If the Government cannot crack that, then their legacy on education could be precisely the opposite of the levelling up aspiration that the Government rightly have.

Chair: I hope very much that you three have regular meetings with Robin Walker and Nadhim Zahawi, the Secretary of State. Do you have a quick question, Caroline?

Q45 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** I have one last question. Mr Laws, you said that we have a quarter of the programme of the Netherlands and America. Are they catching up four times as fast?

David Laws: It is too early to be sure. That is a very good question. We did have our annual lecture for the EPI about a week ago, which was given by Professor Melanie Ehren. You probably know her on the Committee. She is an academic from the Netherlands. She did present some evidence looking at the children who had benefited from the catch-up programme in the Netherlands and their relative pace of progress versus other pupils, and they did appear to be making progress. The

truth is that it is way too early to know for sure and to be able to identify the pupils who are benefiting from the programmatic measures versus those who are not.

What we know is that they have a much better chance of recovering that learning loss because all of the things we have talked about as important—the tutoring, the early years intervention, getting great teachers to teach in some of our toughest schools, covering for teachers who are off because of the pandemic—they have a much better opportunity to do that.

The Government are doing better in this country than some other countries, but the question is whether they are doing enough. Our worry is that they are not doing enough for the pupils who have lost out most and the parts of the country that have lost out most.

Q46 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** You also said the amount of learning loss is about a month. If the proportion of the budget is, if I heard you right, about 10% of the normal budget for a year in terms of billions of pounds—

David Laws: Yes, it is £4.9 billion spread over four or five years of what would normally be a schools budget of about £48 billion. If you take the extra amount in one year it sounds quite good, but if you spread it over four years or five years you are talking about 2% to 2.5% extra on the schools budget. Described in that way, for the crisis that we have had, it sounds a much more modest intervention, which I think it is.

It may be fine in schools in affluent parts of the country with not many poor children. Some of those schools are doing a great job and some of those children were not too far behind. In our most challenging communities for the most disadvantaged youngsters, they could be five, six, seven—in the worst-case scenarios eight—months behind in some of their learning. That is what is coming across from some of our regional data. It is those types of acute impacts that we are worried about.

Dr Caroline Johnson: Better targeting, really.

David Laws: Targeting is important as well as quantum, yes.

Q47 **Chair:** Do you think that Sir Kevan Collins's plans were rejected purely for financial reasons or, as some of the Government have said, including the Prime Minister, that there was not enough detail in the proposals or the detail was not right?

David Laws: Are you putting that to me or to—

Chair: To all of you.

David Laws: The primary reason for its rejection was probably that the Treasury was not willing to bear a bill of that size, particularly in advance of the main spending review. I think also that Sir Kevan's package, as far as we understand it, had a very large component of extended day in it—

that increase in learning time. The evidence, as we have discussed, is mixed around that because it depends whether you have a programme that is well evidenced and focused on attainment or whether it is a programme that is about wellbeing and other things. That probably gave those in Government who did not believe that we should spend that amount of money an evidence base to attack the programme from. It was that combination of Treasury lack of desire to meet the bill combined with the issues around the extended day that probably defeated the programme.

Chair: Becky, and do not be a diplomat.

Professor Francis: I do not think I have anything to add to that analysis. I think that there is an opportunity now to make sure that the funding continues to be sustained in precisely the ways that David has been discussing. That targeted resourcing will be important not just this year but in many years to come.

Chair: Do you agree with the analysis that David set out?

Professor Francis: In terms of speculation, I genuinely do not know what the reason was. Obviously, the scale of the ask and the issues about the basis for—

Chair: You are being a diplomat.

Professor Francis: Yes, I am being diplomatic, thank you.

Nick Bent: The Tutor Trust does its public advocacy through the Fair Education Alliance and collectively we believe that it would have been better for the Government to have endorsed and supported the whole package that Sir Kevan Collins was recommending.

Elements of what the Government have done, so the extra investment in school-led tutoring, the recovery premium and so on, are absolutely welcome and necessary but they should have done a lot more. The whole of Government, and I am sure the whole of this Committee, have agreed that a bold and ambitious plan for education recovery is needed. If the Government did not think that Sir Kevan's bold and ambitious plan was the right one, they have had 20 months to come up with an alternative bold and ambitious plan, and let's hope the new Secretary of State can deliver that.

Chair: Thank you very much. It is really appreciated. As I say, I hope that you do get regular meetings with Ministers. It has been an incredible session and very helpful. I wish you luck in all that you do.