



Business, Innovation and Skills Committee

Oral evidence: [Adult Literacy and Numeracy](#), HC 1073

Tuesday 11 February 2014

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 11 February 2014.

Witnesses including written evidence where submitted:

At 9.30am:

- **David Hughes**, CEO, the [National Institute of Adults Continuing Education \(NIACE\)](#)
- **Helen Casey**, Executive Director, the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy
- **Judith Norrington**, Director of Policy, Research and Regulation, [City and Guilds](#)

10.15am:

- [Libby Coleman](#), author *Yes, We Can Read*
- **Tom Wilson**, Director, [Unionlearn, TUC](#)
- **Linda Curtis**, volunteer for *Read & Grow* initiative

11.00am:

- **Di Lloyd**, Principal, [St Vincent College](#), *Out There* project
- **Jez Langhorn**, Senior Vice President, Chief People Officer, [McDonald's](#)
- **Neil Couling**, Director, Benefit Strategy, [DWP \(Operations Director, Job Centre Plus\)](#)

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Members present: Mr Adrian Bailey (Chair); Mr William Bain; Mr Brian Binley; Paul Blomfield; Katy Clark; Caroline Dinéage; Ann McKechnie; Mr Robin Walker; Nadhim Zahawi

Questions 1-95

Q1 Chair: Can I welcome you and thank you for agreeing to answer our questions today? Before I start the formal questioning, I have just a couple of announcements and some words of advice. First of all, can I say that Caroline Dinéage has promoted this

inquiry in a YouTube video, which is on our website? I am publicly making the announcement; for anybody following this who is interested, please visit the site at: www.parliament.uk/bis.

Can I just ask you to introduce yourselves for voice-transcription purposes?

Judith Norrington: Hello. My name is Judith Norrington.

Chair: Could you just say the organisation you represent?

Judith Norrington: I come from City & Guilds.

Helen Casey: My name is Helen Casey. I am Director of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. We call it NRDC for short. That is based at the Institute of Education in London.

David Hughes: David Hughes from NIACE, the national learning charity.

Q2 Chair: I will start the questions in a moment, but just before I do so, can I make clear that some questions will be person-specific and others will be general? Please do not feel you all have to answer the general questions if you have got nothing to add to or subtract from what a previous speaker has said. We have only got 45 minutes for your particular session, and we have got a lot of questions.

Having said that, I will start with a general question to all of you. I believe the figures show that one in six people in the UK have very poor or no reading skills. In an advanced Western economy and society, that seems to be an incredible statistic. What would you summarise as being the reason for this low level of literacy?

Helen Casey: It is a whole combination of factors; 50% of our young people leaving school do not have GCSEs at grades A to C in English and maths, so they are below the par as they come through the system. We have huge numbers of people in the adult population who are very good at hiding what they cannot do. Nobody likes owning up to their weaknesses. Once people come through the school system and out into adult life, it takes quite a lot of courage to admit that there are things that they are not good at that they need to get help for, particularly when those things have big social stigma around them. Nobody likes admitting that they cannot do things that are considered something that most people learn before the age of seven.

Q3 Chair: You said—and I think it is quite correct—that people become very skilled at hiding their educational inadequacy, if you like, but what is the fault in the process that allows so many to get to that point anyway?

David Hughes: One of the really key issues in school achievement is socio-economic class. If you look at the recent PIAAC report the OECD carried out, one of the startling features of the UK was that class was a massive determinant of people's educational achievement at school and throughout life. It is not a surprise, perhaps, but it was more pronounced in this country than in many other countries. In the US it is very similar, but in most European countries it is much less pronounced.

Q4 Mr Binley: Can I come in there, please? I want to stop you. I am going to give you my background. Secondary modern schoolboy; eldest of five children; lived in a council house; left school at 15. I do not buy what you are telling me. That is the essence of my question to you. I do not understand why kids who are capable of learning to read and write are not being properly taught in primary schools to read and write. Answer me that question.

David Hughes: I am not blaming the individuals. I came from a council estate, from a working-class family.

Mr Binley: Good. Then answer the question for me.

David Hughes: There are lots of people who make it, at school and in adult life. What I am saying is that the school system tends towards supporting people who are well supported in the family and in the community. If you look at the performance of people from deprived backgrounds in the best schools, they do very poorly. If you look at the macro level, you are much more likely to go to university and do well in the system if your parents are graduates. It is that systemic issue that we need to take into account, because it stays with that cohort throughout their lives.

Q5 Chair: Can I just intervene at that point? Brian has raised a very real point. Both Brian and I and maybe others here—but I think we are the oldest here—come from a generation of working-class families that did acquire these skills. To say that something is just class is a bit of a cop out, quite frankly. What is there in the educational system and our society that you have identified that disadvantages those young people—and it is because they are disadvantaged at a young age—and prevents or precludes them from reaching the levels that maybe we did when we were of that age?

Helen Casey: Can I talk from the perspective of adult literacy learners? If you talk to people who have learnt to read for the first time in their lives at the age of 30, 40, 50 or 60, and ask them, “What happened when you were at school?”—and some of them were at school when you were at school and when I was at school—what they tell you is, “I did not get it when I was five or six”. When they move to the curriculum that happens in the junior school, where literacy starts to be the medium of instruction—the medium through which everything else is taught—they are still getting some help, but they are still struggling. When they get to secondary school still unable to decode text, they hide. It is a bigger environment and they get involved perhaps in sports or art. They learn to cover up what they cannot do from a very early age. Again, this is through the eyes of adult literacy learners, rather than myself as an expert on what goes on in primary and secondary. What happens in our secondary education system is that the emphasis in the way schools publicise themselves to the next generation of parents and young people is to do with how many get into university and what their success rates are with the upper half of the children. Secondary education is very poor at giving the lower half of the children aspiration and the different routes that they could follow into vocational education and so on.

Q6 Chair: We are moving on to what was going to be my supplementary question. First of all, Judith, do you want to add anything to that?

Judith Norrington: I agree it is a complex issue. There are some individuals who go through a lot of their scholastic time perhaps with dyslexia and perhaps with other issues

that are not diagnosed, but there is also an issue of what is on offer and the opportunity to learn. Again, from the perspective of adults looking back to when they were younger people, some of them talk about the opportunities to do, make, try and understand maths or, indeed, free writing from a young age, and then we tend to have a single form of curriculum and a single form of outcome. That does suit some people more than others. There will be some who inevitably fare less well in that world.

Q7 Mr Binley: Are you sure you are not making excuses for the education profession? I am in touch with very many of my schoolmates. I live in the village that I was born in. I was away for 47 years, but I have gone back. I watch cricket with 12 of them. We are like *Last of the Summer Wine* multiplied by four, quite frankly. Do not tell me I am Compo, either. Almost everybody in our class when they left primary school could read and could add up—the very basics. What you are therefore telling me is that our teachers seem to have lost the ability. You said they “did not get it”. It is the teachers’ job to ensure they do get it. I just wonder what is going wrong there.

David Hughes: I do not think it is just the teachers’ job. Kids spend 12% of their time in school; they spend the rest of their time not in school. The culture they grow up in is really important.

Q8 Mr Binley: Let me just stop you. When I have a legal problem, I spend an hour with a lawyer; I do not spend my whole time with a lawyer. These are professional people, and I do not want you to make excuses.

David Hughes: I am not making excuses.

Mr Binley: I want you to help us find the reason why kids are coming out of our primary schools not able to read and write. You need to apply yourself to that. You can make all sorts of excuses about class; I do not believe that works. Convince me why our teachers are not doing the job they are paid to do.

David Hughes: The families the children live in and the time they spend with them are critical in terms of getting the culture, the understanding and the motivation to learn. It is really important. The family learning that we promote can be incredibly powerful.

Mr Binley: Did you do a degree in social studies? It sounds like it.

Q9 Chair: Hang on, Brian. Previous to this, we had a conversation, much of which accepted what you are saying. There is obviously a crucial element in the home background there, but the issue is really how the teaching processes overcome the problems that a child may bring to the school. That comes on to my supplementary question. How are low-skilled adults targeted and encouraged to develop their reading and numerical skills? What are the deficiencies in the existing system, and what should be done to improve it?

Helen Casey: I will pick up on family learning, which David mentioned. We have a lot of evidence that it is incredibly powerful. We also have evidence at the moment that the supply of family learning is diminishing fast. What happens in family learning is that you have sessions where parents and children are working together, often with adult skills teachers and primary school teachers. There is a child whose parents cannot read; the parents are learning to read; the child sees the parents learning to read; everybody goes

home with homework, and it changes the culture in the family. Whether or not you use the word “class”, it is about home environments. There are home environments where there are no books and no respect for the written word.

Mr Binley: There always were.

Helen Casey: There are now environments in which that is the case. We have got lots of evidence that when you work with the parents and children together it has a huge effect on bringing the children forward in their progress, as well as equipping the parents with the skills. It may well be that those people that I was describing went to schools where the quality of teaching was not good enough.

Mr Binley: That is the point. Let us admit it. Let us just say it.

Helen Casey: I was not denying it. All professions have good quality and poor quality within them. If you speak to somebody who has gone through the process and did not get what they needed, obviously somebody has missed something all the way down the line, but nobody is 100% perfect at any job. I am not into the blame thing there. The point is that the adult who comes forward into adult life who has learnt to hide that they cannot read and write and get on with life is often working. It is not true that they are all unemployed. Lots of employed people have poor writing and reading skills. Often the trigger that gets people to decide to do something about their skills is when their own children hit school. Everybody, whoever they are, wants the best for their own kids, and when they realise that their children are learning something they failed at and the children are looking at them as a parent to help, that is when often people come forward. Family learning is not only powerful in terms of what it does in the relationships to learning in a family environment, but also because it brings forward people who would not otherwise seek help.

Q10 Chair: I have seen examples of family learning schemes that are very good. How comprehensive is the family learning offer in education, given the scale of the problems that we have got? What could be done to improve it?

David Hughes: We supported an independent inquiry into family learning over 12 months and we came out with a report in October. It is very unsupported, really; it is very ad hoc. Family learning practitioners—teachers—are not well supported. Their continuous professional development is not well supported. It is not funded in every area. Lots of schools do not get involved in it. Lots of local authorities do it, but perhaps not in partnership with schools. It is very patchy. We are doing a lot of work on trying to make it more comprehensive and available everywhere. Where schools do get involved and where they bring the parents in and support and engage the parents, the results are staggering. That gets the whole-school improvement. It is fantastic stuff.

Judith Norrington: Building on that and perhaps taking a slightly different angle, we have got lots of examples—but they are individualised examples. We have got examples of people doing work in agriculture. We have got a research report called “Roots to Work” looking at people working in the community in small green spaces, growing plants, and building their whole range of skills, including literacy and numeracy. We have got examples of people doing work through sport. There is a college that has used snooker as a way of helping adults and young people to learn. There are lots of examples, but the

important point you have raised is how universal they are and also how much opportunity there is for that innovation to be able to work creatively. We have got some very good examples in prisons where people have done individual work linking literacy to arranging visits—the sort of thing you would have to do anyway—and making it more real, and also linking out to the rest of the world. You can talk about what is going on in the news; you can work on sports; you can perhaps do a project on something that other people are working on. Our point of view is that it is really important to have as much facilitation around those mechanisms as possible, because, as you said earlier, this is a very intractable issue. I suppose the shorthand version was: “If it was easy it would have been solved by now”. We are all desperately trying to find out what the right answers are, but meanwhile, the greater the opportunity to have those wider ways of doing things and the more facilitation there is for that, the better.

Q11 Chair: There are some groups that are easily identifiable as having severe problems: offenders, those with mental-health difficulties, and so on. You have mentioned family learning, but those people may not be in a situation whereby they can learn with their children. Have you any ideas about how you might identify those and what sort of support should be there for them?

David Hughes: A lot of the investment from BIS goes into people who are already at Level 1 or Level 2 in terms of literacy and numeracy, and it misses an enormous number of people at Entry Level. That is the hardest group to get to; it is the hardest group to motivate; and they are the people who are most skilled at getting round the fact that they have poor literacy and numeracy. There is a really big challenge about that. The examples Judith gave of different ways of connecting with what will motivate people are really critical.

The other group that I am really concerned about and needs to be highlighted is unemployed people who are being pushed into the Work Programme without an adequate skills diagnostic and without really being able to understand fully the basic skills needs they have, which will help them have a proper job and a proper career, rather than that cycle of getting into a job and getting out again and getting into another entry-level job. That is a missed opportunity from Government. There are lots of strong words at the moment from all parties about the need to provide a proper diagnostic for people who are unemployed. We are seeing patchily some of that working in partnerships between colleges and Jobcentre Plus, but it is still not universal. That means that hundreds of thousands of adults are missing out. There is not enough funding going in to support that very flexible skills provision for unemployed people. What you need is some help for them to get the confidence to get into a job and then to carry on learning to get those fundamental literacy and numeracy skills to be able to stay in work and progress in work. That is absent, largely. There is lots of good progress, but it is very patchy.

Q12 Caroline Dineneage: I wondered if the panel could talk me through what the standard definitions are of what it is to be numerate and literate, and whether these definitions are too narrow or whether they are sufficient, just so that we can work from the ground up on this.

Helen Casey: The definitions used in public funding?

Caroline Dineneage: Are they the same? Are they different?

Helen Casey: We have, for a decade or more, had a definition of a Level 2 threshold. That is still in operation now with the GCSE.

Chair: Can you explain what Level 2 is?

Helen Casey: Level 2 is GCSE A to C equivalent; Level 1 is the lower end of GCSE; the top of Entry Level is the top of primary school; and down from there. The parallels with the curriculum in schools really do not work, because the developmental stage that a seven-year-old is at does not equate to an adult who is a fully-functioning person who happens to not have reading and writing skills.

David Hughes: There is a fundamental question about functional literacy and numeracy and whether the GCSE qualification really gives people the functionality in understanding how to apply the idea of numeracy to the world that they exist in, and whether they have got really functional literacy to be able to communicate and operate in life and in work. There is a real difficulty in pushing the GCSE as the answer for adults, rather than a more functional set of skills. We do a lot of work with the Army. The Army have got some fantastic support for people to get to Level 2 in functional literacy and numeracy. They use the functional skills qualification because that is contextualised; it allows them to apply it to the situation that they are in out in the field or technically, depending on the subject they are studying. That seems to work really well and it seems to motivate people much more than a rather abstract set of skills around algebra, geometry and so on. The functional bit is critical.

Judith Norrington: If I go back to the point that has been made about Entry Level, which I agree with very much, we have created some provision that is stepping stones and helps people towards both functional skills and, if appropriate for them, GCSE. It was designed with all of the points that have been made in mind. It is lots of small, bite-size pieces so that you can really work around your lifestyle and your interests from an adult's perspective rather than that of a child in school, you can design the kinds of activities you do to fit in with your life, and you can use those skills and really hone them, and make sure that you have got them and that they are kept. We have a lot of feedback from people who have begun to use it who have found it life-changing. It has helped people move towards jobs; it has helped people move towards the next steps of their lives, because it accommodates them rather than trying to fit them into a particular shape and size.

Helen Casey: There is big tension inside GCSE between it being preparation for higher study in that subject and preparation for life and work. We are told that employers want GCSEs, but I think that is the one they have heard of, and actually what employers actually want is literate, numerate staff. That is not necessarily what the GCSE does; it equips you for the next stage in that subject.

David Hughes: What adults want might be to be able to read to their child, or to be able to read out loud and be confident. It might be to be able to talk to the teacher and understand the curriculum that their child is learning. The motivation of the adult is critical, and it does not seem to fit very well with the qualification of the day, which is the GCSE in English and maths.

Helen Casey: It is true that successive initiatives have overlooked the people at the lowest levels. Skills for Life spent a lot of money on people at Level 1 and Level 2, and during that period the provision for those with skills at Entry Level—i.e. the lowest level of skills—who perhaps cannot decode text and cannot write at a fairly basic level diminished, because of the way that targets were geared. We are still in that situation now; it has not re-emerged. It is sorting out the problems of people at those lowest Entry Levels that has the biggest benefit to the public purse, because all of our research shows that they are the people who crop up again and again as expensive to the public purse in health, housing, the secure estate and so on.

Q13 Caroline Dinenage: It seems to be socially acceptable for people to say, “I am rubbish at maths”, and yet people will very rarely admit to being illiterate or being unable to read; there is a social stigma attached to that. How does that affect adult education provision? How does that affect people’s desire to seek help for literacy problems? How do you address that?

David Hughes: It is profound. It is getting worse as well, because in the modern world, not only do you need to be numerate and literate; you also need some technological skills. The world of work is getting rapidly different and harder to get into. It is very difficult when you are in a workplace to own up and say, “I am deficient in these skills”, because what will the employer do? I saw Tom Wilson from Unionlearn arrive; union learning reps can help with that. We work with community learning champions to come alongside people and to give them that confidence. Often, people will underplay the numeracy skills they do have and say, “I am just useless at maths” but they manage to work out timetables and get from A to B on time and get the right amount of food shopping. All of those are numeracy skills, but they do not see them as numeracy, because they equate numeracy with maths, and algebra, geometry and those sorts of things. A lot of it is about saying to people, “Probably most of us can do some numeracy, and therefore we should try to do more”. The applicability of it in everyday life is all around us. We use maths all the time, but we just do not call it “maths”. There are ways to address that. For instance, we have got a new app that is available, called “Maths Everywhere”, which is about giving people real-life examples of when numeracy is really important to them. It is an easy way to do it without the stigma, because you do not have to go and say to anybody, “I cannot do maths”.

Judith Norrington: Interestingly enough, we did some work with the Future Foundation comparing views of adults and young people, and quite a lot of young people from 16 to 18 and 18 to 20 did identify not having enough numeracy skills as one of the things they wanted to address. In some of the work we are beginning to do on the digital literacy side and more sophisticated use of technology in both learning and assessment, at the initial stages, if you are letting somebody play with the system to find out how good they are, they do seem to be more prepared to state where their gaps are, because it is in a non-judgmental environment, whereas all the points that have been made about coping and strategies for masking what they do are very true in many adults who are holding down jobs. It is that opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and to build on it in a way that makes sense for you. If there is a common theme that is coming out a lot, it is about having flexibility, but having it relevant for you and your life. As David has just said, you can demonstrate then a whole range of different ways of building those skills.

Helen Casey: It is also true that in numeracy we have got a much bigger problem, in that the figures in the population are much higher and it goes much higher through the layers of society. There are people in quite high, responsible positions who will say, “I am not very good at maths”. If you scratch the surface, it is much more prevalent, and it is much more of a problem for us in finding enough teachers who really have the depth of understanding in maths to make a good job of sorting out other people’s problems and misconceptions. Far too many people—young people in the school system and adults—are taught by people who are not really confident in the depth of their own knowledge in that subject. We replicate that one in a big way. We could make a big difference by creating a whole new cadre of people who are seriously excellent at the teaching of maths. I mean “maths” in its broadest sense, including relevance.

Q14 Caroline Dinenage: What is worse, then? Is the numeracy problem worse because there is not so much of a stigma to saying, “I am rubbish at maths”, or is the literacy problem worse because there is such a stigma to saying, “I cannot read” that people do not come forward and admit there is a problem?

Helen Casey: They are just different.

David Hughes: It is the devil and the deep blue sea, isn’t it? Some of the people we are talking about have both literacy and numeracy deficiencies and challenges and probably do not understand the health messages and probably have financial literacy and digital literacy challenges as well, and therefore it is multifaceted. I would not like to say one is worse than the other.

Q15 Caroline Dinenage: No, but is it easier to tackle a problem that people identify that they have, or is it easier to tackle a problem that people are not admitting to having?

David Hughes: Personally, I think that most people identify something they want to do and then they say, “What is stopping me doing it?” Sometimes that is numeracy; sometimes it is literacy; and sometimes it is those other literacies. I would focus on the motivator rather than the problem. “What is it you want to do and how can we help you?” is quite a positive discussion. Asking, “What are you deficient in?” is a very negative way of doing it. It is that motivator. It is the snooker; it is the sport; it is the health; it is the family. Getting to people in that way and helping them learn and giving them the confidence to learn is the nub of the issue.

Q16 Ann McKechnin: If I could just go on with the issue about skills, according to the evidence from National Numeracy, “there has long been an assumption—in Government and elsewhere—that numeracy and literacy abilities need not be equivalent”. Do you think that is an old-fashioned view or not?

David Hughes: Most of us have got quite spiky profiles in our competencies across different literacies and numeracy. What matters is that people get the skills they need to be able to do what they want to do, which is perhaps a cop-out answer. It is one of those questions to which I do not think there is a yes/no answer. What you have to do is to say, “What skills do people need in the context they are in, and how do we give them the confidence to go and find new skills when they need to find new things?” That could be numeracy; it could be literacy; it could be digital; and it could be all sorts of other things.

Q17 Ann McKechin: You are taking it from the view of the individual adult learner, but if I took it from the point of view of the economy of this country, where we have a pronounced shortage of people with appropriate expertise in STEM subjects, it would appear that we have not given enough priority to the issues of both numeracy and mathematical skills, which are distinct.

Helen Casey: We have long had a situation where numeracy has been in the shadow of literacy. People talk about basic skills and lump them together, and then the focus goes on to literacy first. I did some work years ago looking at what then was called basic skills teacher training. People would come forward to do that, and they had different options—there were qualifications from your organisation at the time, Judith—to do literacy and numeracy. When you scratched the surface at the end of the programme, all of them were doing the literacy option and about a third of them were doing the numeracy option. In order to create a better supply of numeracy teachers, we had to make a course that only did numbers, because different people come forward.

Q18 Ann McKechin: The number of people who were providing it was also imbalanced. Is that the problem?

Helen Casey: It is also because of our backgrounds and the way that our world has been, in the past—arts and sciences. People are either comfortable with words or they are comfortable with numbers; we have not very easily produced people who are really comfortable in a deep way with both.

Judith Norrington: There is also an important point about how much opportunity people have to do applied learning. We come from a vocational background, but our perspective is that people learn STEM subjects really effectively when they are learnt as part of an engineering course, part of a construction course or part of an agriculture course, because they need to know the amounts or the sizes or the measurements or the pressure. We have increasingly moved towards encouraging people to do a lot of academic study up to the age of 16 to give a broad and balanced basis, but some of those opportunities that people might have had in the past to do more practical, hands-on things are not there. For some, the learning opportunity through that approach to the STEM subjects is the one that will help them succeed more effectively.

Q19 Ann McKechin: Following on from that comment, Joan O'Hagan, in giving evidence, recommended teaching adults maths within the context of real-life issues. There has been quite an ongoing debate about how it is presented, but it does seem to me that there is a difference between mechanical skills, such as reading and arithmetical skills, and intellectual skills, which is maths. They are quite distinct. You need to have arithmetical skills to be able to learn maths, but not vice versa. One is a mechanical skill and one is a more theoretical intellectual pursuit. If we end up classifying one lot of people as having to see it in real-life issues, whereas other people are taught in a different way that is much more in the intellectual scope, do we end up widening the class divide that you were talking about earlier this morning?

David Hughes: Joan talks quite a lot about mathematical concepts as well, does she not, rather than mathematical skills per se? That is critical. To learn mathematical concepts, you have to be fairly literate as well, because a lot of it is about understanding of words. It

is all a bit circular, isn't it? What we want is people who have a range of skills that help them get on in life. Some of that is about literacy, some of that is about maths and some of it is about numeracy. In STEM, you need people to go much further in numeracy. As Helen and Judith said, there has been a deficiency in teaching staff who can do the maths and numeracy really well. What we have got at the moment is a lot of investment in that aimed at 16 to 18-year-olds resitting GCSEs, and perhaps not as much investment in teaching for adults.

Ann McKechin: In recruiting people who have got good mathematical backgrounds.

David Hughes: And to teach adults in particular, because teaching adults is different from teaching 16 and 17-year-olds.

Q20 Mr Bain: The OECD analysis from late last year was very worrying, because it shows there is a bigger gap between richer and poorer areas than in any other major country, and also the issue about parental background. In terms of the provision of skills and numeracy and literacy education to try to counter that problem, do you think that the current system is too much led by qualifications rather than the specific needs of learners?

David Hughes: Yes.

Helen Casey: Yes.

David Hughes: Definitely. The focus is on big qualifications. A lot of what we have been saying this morning is that that is not accessible to lots of people who need to progress in different ways. The Skills Funding Agency and BIS have started to move towards unitisation and funding of units for adults, which is really powerful and helpful, and City & Guilds and other awarding bodies have helped support that. That ability to pull in a number of units that meet people's immediate needs and allow them to take smaller steps, build confidence and build self-esteem is critical, but, again, it is held back by the amount of funding that is available and the quality of the teachers to be able to deliver that very personalised and quite difficult offer to people who need to be motivated and need a lot of extra support. As the money overall diminishes, at least in terms of the budget of the Skills Funding Agency in England, some of that hard-to-reach and hard-to-do extra supported learning gets pushed to one side.

Judith Norrington: It is not axiomatic that it is one or the other. If you were to ask me, "Is it more important that somebody has the skills?" I would say, "Yes". I do not know whether it will come up later, but Tom Wilson talks very eloquently about the fact that, for a lot of people in employment—and we are talking about adults; that is what many of these are—it is valuable for them to have a certificate, or something that demonstrates that they have succeeded. For many of them, particularly if they have had a not particularly pleasant school experience, it is a real motivating point. But it has to be shaped in this opportunity to do units or bite-sized pieces—whatever phrasing we want to use. A whole lump of learning for the sort of qualification that might take you a year to do end to end is not the answer. I do not think it has to be one or the other, but you do have to make sure that the opportunities to do any studying meet those parameters.

Helen Casey: It is about practices as well as skills. Some of the evaluations of the literacy and numeracy learning programmes have struggled to find impact on a short-term basis

from a learning intervention and an outcome measured in terms of skill gain, but the international evidence has shown that it takes time. You are dealing with adults who did not learn during school; they have perhaps hidden it for 10 or 20 years of adult life, and they then start learning. It does not happen in the three months or six months of a learning intervention; that starts a change that takes years. If you want to measure in a short or medium term, you need to look at practices—changing habits and activities in their lives. Those changing practices generate a knock-on effect and the skills change over time. Our emphasis on qualifications in return for public spend on learning activity has created the situation in which the ones at the lowest levels have been left out. It is always the people who are quickest to get there that are the most cost-efficient to help. We also have very big steps in our qualifications. Going from zero—cannot read at all—to achieving Entry Level 1 is a very long journey, and without the units that Judith and David are talking about it is not do-able within the 12 months that our funding systems work on.

David Hughes: One other thing that the OECD report said, which was not very well reported, is that people lose their skills quite quickly as well. One of the problems with a funding system that says as soon as you have your Level 2, that is your entitlement gone, is that you might be out of the labour market for five or 10 years—for family, unemployment, illness or all sorts of reasons—and when you come back, some refreshment is really important. That is really critical when we have got 1 million young people who are not in active employment at the moment, who might have got their GCSE or some level of numeracy and literacy, but you can bet your bottom dollar that they will be losing it quite quickly. The funding system does not really allow for that; once you get it, you are done.

Q21 Mr Bain: Yes. That is a really important point. Does that therefore change how we define success? There have to be less target-driven policies coming from the centre, and more diversity and opportunities for people in the workplace to pick up skills in more tailored means than we have ever seen before.

Judith Norrington: Yes. To echo the point that has just been made, the quote from the OECD is: “But countries must combine this with flexible, skills-oriented learning opportunities throughout life, in particular for working-age adults”. That is exactly the point you have made. It is really important that you are able to continue and sustain it. It is one of those things that is quite hard to measure, but we know it makes the difference to people’s lives, and we need to avoid the perverse incentives of the sort of measure that either encourages learning to be supported not at the appropriate first rungs, as we have talked about, or that have only one offer and therefore you are limited in what success looks like. Success needs to look like a lot more things, because those are the things that will really make the difference for individuals.

Q22 Mr Bain: I speak as a former university lecturer, who sometimes had to teach things that were not within my specialism—such are the perils of the HE sector at times. Do you agree that it is worrying that there is a tendency for maths to be taught by people who perhaps have a non-maths specialism, particularly where we are talking about adults?

Helen Casey: Absolutely. Particularly with people who have found it difficult to learn. People who have found it easy to learn might have done so without much help, or with only a little bit of help. What we are dealing with in the adult population with low literacy

and numeracy are people who, for one reason or another, found it difficult. They need expert help. That is not to say there is not a role in some of this for volunteers, befrienders and people who help with all of the difficult psychological things that go with having covered up a lack of skill for many years, but if they do not get the expert help, what can very easily happen is that, because the common solutions have already been tried and failed, failure repeats and then the problem becomes even deeper in terms of its cover-up.

David Hughes: In apprenticeships now, there is an expectation that apprentices will achieve Level 2. A lot of the people teaching apprentices do not have Level 2 or Level 3 in maths themselves, yet they are expected to provide that training. There is an upskilling of people who are solely maths teachers, but there are also people who are trying to contextualise the learning and embed it within a vocational specialism who need some support themselves to be much more confident about teaching and understanding the different ways you can help support people.

Judith Norrington: I would very much echo those points. Chichester College runs a system where they try to embed English and maths in every single programme that they offer. It is required for young people, and it is optional for adults. Their biggest challenge is finding the right teachers with the right experience. There was a little indication in the SFA document that came out last night on additional support for teaching. At the moment, the bursaries are very linked to people who are graduates and have not yet taught English and maths. We would strongly recommend that there should be a much wider opportunity for people to have the opportunity to study and increase their teaching capability in this area. Everybody deserves to be taught by somebody who has got the right skills to do it, and we will get better results if that is the outcome.

Q23 Mr Binley: Can I refer to the OECD Survey of Adult Skills published in October of last year? One of the main findings—William touched on this—was that England is the only country in the developed world where the generation approaching retirement is more literate and numerate than the youngest adults. Do we mean “Britain”?

David Hughes: It was only England and Northern Ireland that participated.

Mr Binley: That is what I thought. That is a frightening prospect for our future well-being in terms of earning our living in a competitive world. Although we can talk about creating rounded human beings, you first have got to have human beings who have food to eat and warmth to live in. I just wonder whether the educational establishment has become too removed from the rest of the real world of work to be able to produce the sorts of citizens we need to fulfil that function of earning our living in an ever more competitive world. I am talking about a long-term situation, and I am talking about both Governments; this is not a party-political situation. We have failed on the basis of that statement, and I wonder how we recognise that, first of all—I do not think we are recognising it—and, secondly, how we put it right.

David Hughes: We are certainly recognising it. That is why we are here, isn't it?

Mr Binley: I am not sure. We are here, but I am not sure the nation has recognised it.

David Hughes: It is appalling that a modern society can have those sorts of results and that we can have adults and young children coming through. We still have a school

system, as we have said before, that is pushing young people out without literacy and numeracy, and we have an adult system that is not really getting enough funding to the people who need the support most.

Q24 Mr Binley: Hang on; that is an old cry. It has been an old cry from the educational establishment for years. What we need to do is dig down below those sorts of defences and get to the real reason why teachers are not able to teach as well as they seemingly used to be able to teach right at the basic levels of our educational system.

David Hughes: I was not being at all defensive; I was trying to be offensive.

Mr Binley: Well, then I was offended. Carry on.

David Hughes: There needs to be more investment for adults, and there needs to be more investment aimed at the people with the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy. That is one of the things that we need to get right.

Q25 Mr Binley: Can you help me to know how we do that?

David Hughes: There is no silver bullet, is there? There are all sorts of different ways, and we have talked about a number of them. We need to push family learning more, because that helps the children and the adults—carers and parents. We need to look to what motivates adults to get into work with the right skills. We do a lot of work with the Army. The Army has put into the whole of its culture the need for literacy and numeracy and makes fantastic progress with some of the most disadvantaged young people coming into the system. There are responsibilities across all of civil society: for employers, Government, schools and colleges.

Q26 Mr Binley: I accept that. I am an employer of a company with 180 people, which I founded in 1989. Let me go back to that particular point. We need three basic skills. We need keyboard skills; we need conversational skills; and we need spelling skills, because we build information databases for businesses throughout the world. We have got very good people skills, surprisingly. We have not got bad conversational skills. We give people a simple test, to spell words like “aspect”, “business” and those sorts of things. The number of people who come up with no correct answers out of 10 or one out of 10 is amazing. You would not have had that situation with those people 40 years ago. Genuinely you would not. I can tell you because I was there. Take it from me. You would not have had that.

David Hughes: I am not sure I accept that.

Mr Binley: I am telling you it is bloody true, so let us go on.

Chair: Brian, I have to say, I taught English in a secondary modern school in the 60s, and believe you me, there was a cohort who would not have been able to do that.

Mr Binley: There is always a cohort. It is the size of the cohort we are talking about. I want to know how much help we can give to businesses to improve the skills of their employees. We do very little of that; it is a real opportunity that we overlook. Am I right?

David Hughes: You have got McDonald’s coming later, have you not? Similarly to the Army, McDonald’s talk about the need for basic skills in the workplace and they are

incredibly encouraging. It is a very supportive environment; it is very flexible. The expectation is that if you want to get on in the Army, and if you want to get on in McDonald's and other employers, you need those basic skills. If every employer did that, it would make a massive difference.

Q27 Mr Binley: Half of our population work in the SME sector. That is the real problem. How do we get to that?

David Hughes: That is much tougher, isn't it?

Mr Binley: Give me the answer. You are an expert.

Helen Casey: We need to remember that the educational establishment is not one thing. All three of us sitting here come from the world of adult learning.

Mr Binley: I understand that, but you are well aware of the problem. I wondered whether you had any ideas to help us ensure that businesses are doing more to train the work force we need to create.

Judith Norrington: There are some very good examples. We have already heard a couple. Barclays has an amazing programme going on of working with young people, and they feel it part of their responsibility and they want to do that. We have referenced in our evidence people like TUI, the travel company, who are also doing that kind of work. A lot of employers, while they would love it not to be their problem and they would love people to come through the door with all the right skills, do embrace the idea of building particularly people who are coming in on attitudinal points, who are willing, who want to learn and who want to do. That is a way forward. Some of the answers to what would work perhaps can be taken from what is now working in those workplaces. I was talking yesterday to someone from Barclays who was saying that he has got people working there who have quite high maths qualifications and some who have got none at all, but it is the first time that even those who have got GCSEs have ever had to make a decision about the number, if you see what I mean, because they are now making decisions about people in relation to whether they give loans or whether they do a particular transaction. That is something they have never encountered in their school career. Some of the answer in this is to learn what is working well in those environments and perhaps look at whether we can replicate it more before people leave school, rather than only afterwards, when other people have to pick it up.

Helen Casey: I was going to make a similar point about literacy. In adult literacy, you are working with the people that the schools did not succeed with, but we work in different worlds. The school teachers are trained completely differently. The kind of expertise that exists in adult literacy is in very scant supply inside a secondary school. We could do more to permeate on maths and English, as well as on vocational and business realities.

David Hughes: The other SME issue is about business case, is it not? I do not think we should be saying to SMEs, "Do this because you want to do something for society"; we should be saying, "You need to do this to be successful". The UK Commission for Employment and Skills employer skills survey a couple of weeks ago showed some quite worrying signs; 40% of employers do not train their staff at all; 20% say, "We do not know how to"; the other 20% say, "We do not need to". It is that 20% that you think,

“They are probably not going to exist for very long”. We need to make the business case to them, and then we need to help them with how to do it.

Q28 Paul Blomfield: I wonder if I could engage with you on the qualifications of teachers and the level of continuing professional development for teachers of adult literacy and numeracy. BIS has said that “learner progress in literacy is greater where teachers have qualified teacher status, and in numeracy where teachers are qualified in maths to Level 3”. Ofsted has said specifically that teachers of adult literacy and numeracy lack expertise. I wondered what thoughts you had on how we could enhance teachers’ skills through continuing professional development and in other ways.

Helen Casey: Teachers of adult literacy and numeracy are not one group. Ten years ago, only about a third of them were qualified to do the job. There was a period of intensive teacher training. By about 2008 or 2009, we had got up to about 60% of them being qualified to do the job. That is now ebbing away. Lord Lingfield, in his second report, separated out English and maths as an area where the expertise and professionalism was still of key importance, but in practice at the moment that is very muddy and very washy. Ofsted are clear, because they are still seeing on a regular basis the other 40% who have never been trained to do the job they are doing. What is happening now is that too many people, where they are being trained to teach adults, are being trained to teach adults in general, without the subject depth. There is a particularly pedagogy to teaching adult literacy or adult numeracy that works, and there are too many people out there doing the job who have not had access to that at all.

Q29 Paul Blomfield: You are helping me to define the problem. What is the answer?

Helen Casey: Train more teachers.

Judith Norrington: We have some qualifications that are designed to be offered for continuous professional development. One of the challenges, though, is that we need to also support teachers to access those in a way that feels developmental. It is clear that not all teachers feel secure in English and maths, and therefore it is a way of helping them to develop additional skills. We are wondering whether some of the video pieces that we are putting together to help learners, and whether the opportunity to study in the same way—studying in smaller pieces, as you said, and CPD opportunities, whether they are in digital literacy or in a financial context, which make it real and are therefore much more appropriate to be taught back to their students—will also be useful for teachers who want to refresh and gain skills.

Helen Casey: We also could do something publicly to counter the popular opinion that anybody can teach basic skills. It is evidently not the case, but people are still employing people to teach basic skills on the assumption that you can do it, therefore you can teach it. It is not the case.

David Hughes: There is quite a lot going on, so it is not a terrible picture. There is money coming from the Department for Education and BIS to train new teachers and to attract graduates into the system. A lot of that is being targeted at the GCSE resits for 16 to 18-year-olds and, in a sense, at the expense of some of the adult teachers, so there is a bit of an issue about rebalancing that investment. The numbers are quite scary. Various

people over the last three, four or five years have talked about 5,000, 6,000 or 7,000 maths teachers being needed alone in the system. The new requirement on GCSE resits for 16 and 17-year-olds will make that higher, so it could be 7,000, 8,000 or 9,000; who knows? We are not going to plug that gap just by bringing in recent graduates; there has got to be some re-training of people already in the system. That is one answer. There has got to be training of people who are specialists in certain curriculum areas to embed the literacy and numeracy and to be able to make sure it is delivered alongside their vocational specialism. Perhaps that CPD is not being done systematically at the moment. I am a director of the Education and Training Foundation, a new organisation supported by BIS and DfE, and there is a lot going on through that. We are investing several million at the moment in both new graduate support in the form of bursaries, and CPD training for existing teachers.

Q30 Caroline Dinenage: How, then, do the panel explain the success of peer-based learning programmes, where non-qualified people are teaching others, with huge success, to read and, in actual fact, overcoming the stigma of people not feeling that they want to be taught by somebody who is a teaching professional?

David Hughes: It is a lot about motivation. If somebody you know and who you feel is like you says, “Come on; let us just do a bit and learn together”, it can work. What we are talking about, though, is what those people go on to do when they want to increase and improve their skills beyond some of that entry-level work, because peer-to-peer is limited. We can help other people learn to a certain level, but there is an important space for professional teachers to help people really progress as well. It is not one or the other; it is both.

Chair: If you can add or challenge any of that, please do. Otherwise, we will move on.

Helen Casey: Yes. Peer-to-peer plus experts. It cannot do everything. It is practice. It cannot teach something that is not explained. It cannot diagnose a difficulty that has not been diagnosed. In some cases, peer-to-peer can go wrong and it will just break down on a personality level, but it is because the person giving the help has not got the expertise. You need to back it up.

Caroline Dinenage: We have probably got some other witnesses who might challenge that.

Q31 Mr Walker: I just want to follow up on Brian’s point about people employed by SMEs. There are huge numbers of people out there who are employed by SMEs. You mentioned a number of the companies and organisations that are doing this well, like Barclays, the army and TUI. One thing they all have in common is that they are very large organisations. How can we help small organisations, where people are pressed for time and money, to see the benefits of providing support to people with numeracy and literacy? Is part of the answer, as David was talking about earlier in terms of the Army, a focus on providing functional skills qualifications rather than purely academic ones?

David Hughes: The functionality is critical. It is sometimes about trying to decipher for people what we mean by numeracy and literacy. It is not very well understood. Literacy is not just about being able to write an essay; literacy is about understanding instructions and being able to communicate. We did a piece of work for BIS with SMEs that we have

not yet been able to publish, which was about their experience of young people coming into the workplace with GCSEs in English and maths. What they said was that even where they have got a GCSE in English and maths, their communication style is inappropriate, both in writing and verbally—they might be too informal. They said that they would often use a calculator to make a calculation, but they had no estimation skill within their head, so if they mis-keyed and the answer came out wrong by a factor of 10, they believed it. There is something about trying to explain what we mean by how you can be functional in those communication skills as well as the numerical reasoning and thinking.

Q32 Mr Walker: You mentioned just then that you did a piece of research that you have not been able to publish. Is that something that you will be able to publish in the fullness of time, or is it something you are being held back from publishing?

David Hughes: It was focus groups with SMEs. Broadly what it suggested was that employers were not completely enamoured with the GCSE as a qualification. The research was deemed to be useful to BIS in terms of their thinking, but not something, because it was not scientific, that should be published widely.

Mr Walker: I think we would be interested in—

Chair: I was going to say: could you do a summary for us? It might well be useful for us as well.

David Hughes: Yes.

Chair: Do you wish to add or subtract anything?

Judith Norrington: I was just going to add that there are other ways of doing it, like group training associations, if an SME is part of a supply chain, and working through colleges and other training institutions that put on classes for groups of SMEs. The challenge is very real, and your point is absolutely right.

Chair: That completes our questioning. I am conscious of the fact that there were areas that we would have liked to have explored more and where you may well have liked to have said more. Please feel free to submit in written form any evidence that you feel that you have not been able to bring before the Committee today. Equally, if we feel there are further questions, we will write to you and would be grateful for your response. I thank you very much. I think it is fair to say the questioning has been fairly robust, and your responses have been interesting and sometimes equally robust. This debate will go on. Thank you very much for your contribution today; it was very useful indeed.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Libby Coleman**, Author, *Yes We Can Read*, **Tom Wilson**, Director, Unionlearn, TUC, and **Linda Curtis**, Volunteer, Read & Grow, gave evidence.

Q33 Chair: Good morning and thank you for agreeing to speak to us. I see that you have been listening with interest to the previous comments. We are running behind time, so I will crack on, but first of all can you just introduce yourselves for voice-transcription purposes?

Libby Coleman: I am Libby Coleman. I am the co-creator of *Yes We Can Read*, which is a one-to-one peer-to-peer teaching and reading book, which anyone at all who can read fluently can pick up to teach someone else to read fluently and for meaning.

Tom Wilson: I am Tom Wilson. I am the Director of Unionlearn, which is the learning and skills arm of the TUC.

Linda Curtis: I am Linda Curtis. I am a volunteer from Gosport Read & Grow group, which coaches people from Libby's book and proves that you can do it if you do it one-to-one.

Q34 Chair: I am going to open with a question to Libby. Again, I do not need everybody on the panel to answer all questions—only if you feel that there is something you need to add or subtract. First of all, Libby, you have written this book. It has been very successful. Can you explain why?

Libby Coleman: Can I just go back a little bit and answer the questions that have arisen vis-à-vis the group that we really are talking about in this project, which is addressing the issue of the three Rs for all? We are talking about a scandalous number of the population who are unable to read. They are the people we can see on the programme *Benefits Street* and on *The Jeremy Kyle Show*.

Chair: Yes. We understand the target.

Libby Coleman: Yes. They are the people in the prisons. I must emphasise they are not people who are going to go out and go to classes. They are never going to do that. They are not looking to go to classes, groups or any of that. This is not what is going to happen. Because the problem was so acute, I felt that the only solution that we would come up with was “each one teach one”—if those of us who can read teach those of us who cannot.

I was very lucky to be in the same position as Brian. In my case, I grew up in care, but I was a teacher in a comprehensive school in the late 1960s where there were so many children coming up from the primary school unable to read that there was no chance that we secondary school teachers could possibly even think about getting them to do GCSEs—they were called CSEs then. We went to the head and said, “We cannot do this. They are coming up from the primary school and 80% of them are unable to read.” He said, “Do not just sit there; get out and teach them.” He said, “Right. You have got one hour in which to learn how to teach reading—phonics, look and say, how do you teach this; the basic mechanics, for meaning, so that those children will learn to read. Get out and do it.” We had to do it in our lunch hour. History teacher, drama teacher, maths teacher—it did not matter who we were. For this reason, I knew that it was not an issue of specialism. When we are talking about basic skills, we are talking about something you just need the confidence to be told how to do. We felt that we had to produce something that anyone who could read could use, whether they were autistic, 80 years old or Travellers who had just learnt to read themselves; it did not matter. It had to be applicable for everyone, as long as we could follow the steps.

It is incredibly important to say one vital thing. Until you can read for meaning, you cannot use a computer and you cannot start looking at maths. You have got to get that first. We have got to get that through to everybody. We can do it. We have all got to join hands with all the different strategies from every quarter. I cannot emphasise how important it is that there are very cheap books, like the amazing *Quick Reads*, for everybody to pick up.

Chair: I am coming on to that in a second.

Libby Coleman: Sorry. What I am saying is we have got to be able to read for meaning first, before we can go to the next stage.

Q35 Chair: First of all, can I say that my own experience in a secondary school in the 60s mirrored yours? I have a couple of quick questions. Could your approach be used for teaching maths?

Libby Coleman: Yes, it could. This book uses very conventional teaching strategies. They would be recognised by everybody. They are a variety of phonics, look and say, and so on. The success and power of this book, which could be replicated for maths, lies in the instructions for the coaches, which make it very clear step by step what to do. It bears in mind that people who do this may not have any skills in teaching at all but feel confident with numbers, so if you explain to them how to do it step by step—and it is giving the coach the confidence to go out there and teach that is critical—then there is no reason why we could not have the same thing available.

Q36 Chair: You are touching on some questions that are coming up, but I will just quickly move on. You mentioned *Quick Reads*. What are the differences between your book and *Quick Reads*?

Libby Coleman: This must come first, because they have got to learn to read before they can read a book. *Quick Reads* in particular are critical. We may feel, “Does it really matter, as long as people can read, whether or not they go and read books?” With the target group that I outlined before, it is of fundamental importance that they read books. One thing that we, who are literate, do not realise is that reading books develops a particular skill that is missing from people in prison, and people who are disaffected and disassociated; it develops empathy—putting yourself into the shoes of others. This is a particular skill that reading books develops. For this reason alone, it is essential that we try to get businesses to support this particular project. As I have said, you have got to learn to read first, and the only way we can do that is if we all teach somebody. The next stage is that we have got to support all the different initiatives that develop these skills. Then people can go on and do the 12 steps that get them off alcohol addiction; then they can go and do evening classes; then they can teach their children to read.

Q37 Mr Bain: You have spoken, Libby, very movingly about the way that your book gives coaches the techniques to be able to teach a variety of different people from different backgrounds and different social contexts. Can you explain just a little more about how prisoners, homeless people, Travellers, and even ex-street-children in Uganda, without literacy skills can learn from the same book?

Libby Coleman: If I can just take Holloway prison, where this is working with great success, the Holloway librarian leaves this book lying on the side and there is a poster that says, “If you can read, pick up this book and you will be able to teach your cellmate”. That is all that it requires. They read the instructions and then each particular day is set out step by step, so that everybody knows exactly what they have got to do at any given time. Then the instructions are repeated in one word, just in case somebody has got an off-day or does not read the instructions on the next page. We have homeless people whom other homeless people are teaching. We have one homeless man who taught nine people to read in a year. It does not matter who you are if you can read. This is the only way that we could see that we could start to make a massive impact, together with all the other strategies out there—and there are many of them.

Whilst this is the first step, all these different groups and initiatives out there need to be brought together. We need to be brought together not in conferences where we all go, “I have done this”; we need to get together and say, “Right. You can build on this. We can do this.” We need to be brought together to work together in order to crack this incredibly intractable nut. We also need to tackle this within communities. I must emphasise that that is never going to happen unless we have got somebody very high up in Government who makes that happen. I feel that there is only one person who is able to bring all these disparate groups with their different interests together to work towards this common goal of stamping out illiteracy and innumeracy. That has to be the one person who has made it all happen, Caroline Dinenege. I cannot thank you enough for doing that.

Chair: On cue, I was just about to ask Caroline to come in with a supplementary.

Q38 Caroline Dinenege: Libby, can I just ask you one question? When I met with one of the homeless charities that have been using your book, they said that one of the keys to its success was the fact that people could see progress almost straight away, and so that was building confidence. Do you think that is one of the keys—that people can make almost immediate progress, or is that irrelevant?

Libby Coleman: No, it is essential that from the very first second they are achieving, because this is a group who have no confidence and have failed so many times. Right from the very first second they sit down, they have got to be succeeding. Furthermore, so does the coach, for confidence. There are lots of features that are critical to this. This is not just some little textbook that has been thrown out here; this is a very complicated design that has lots of reasons for why it succeeds. In order to save time, would it be helpful if perhaps I answered those questions through a further submission?

Chair: Yes.

Q39 Nadhim Zahawi: Libby, I am mesmerised by your passion for this. As someone who is relatively new to this whole area—I am hoping to learn through this inquiry—I suspect one of the biggest barriers is people admitting that they cannot read. How do you reach those people? What you have done is brilliant, because it allows us to really scale this up and, as you say, crack this intractable nut, but how do you overcome the barrier of people coming forward and saying, “I need help”?

Libby Coleman: That is the \$64,000 question. That is the big one. There are a group of extraordinary people out there—and Linda will talk about this—who move heaven and

earth to try to think of different ways of reaching out to these people. I said right at the beginning who the target group were. It is a middle-class fallacy—that I also promote, dare I say—that these people are very difficult to reach and they will not admit it. That is not true. If you think about prisons, everybody in prison knows who cannot read and who can, because everybody is very open about it. Half the people cannot read so nobody is ashamed of it, and you have got to ask your cellmate to read your letters from home and from the Home Office, or whatever. Everybody in prison knows who the non-readers and the readers are. They all know each other; it is not a problem. They have just got to go, “Yes, come with me; I will show you”. On an estate of deprivation, there will be one person who does the reading for everybody. If you have seen *Benefits Street*, the big fat lady, White Dee, reads for everybody. They go to her. She does the reading; she does the writing; she does the phoning; she does the maths; she keeps the money, and all of those things. On an estate, if we could get in there, everybody knows who the people who can read are, and they all know who the non-readers are, because they come to them and say, “Help. What is this nonsense?” Those of us who come from the outside make assumptions that are not necessarily true. That is why I said at the beginning we have really got to think about who these people are we are talking about.

Q40 Mr Bain: Can anyone teach anyone else how to read?

Linda Curtis: I have proved it. We have got 40 volunteers in Gosport who have proved it. We have got Year 11s teaching Year 7s in Brune Park who have proved it. Anybody can do it. Libby and Nick have written this fantastic book. I am not a teacher. I have gone through a good education, but I have never gone to university or taught or done anything like that in my life. When I saw this book and read it, I thought, “Flipping heck; I could do this.” I had the most amazing learner, for a start: a Chinese lady who had come over from Singapore 40-odd years ago and could not do anything, with no education whatsoever. I have coached that woman to read. She won a NIACE learner of the year award last year. She has just been fantastic. Now she is writing her life story. In two years, we have moved on. I have got so many stories from Gosport of people who, like myself, have never been trained but have used this book. We have helped people. We have got 80-year-olds; 76-year-olds; and two 18-year-olds. It just goes on and on. It can be done. As Libby was saying, getting the people to come forward has been our biggest challenge. We are working on that. My colleague Ewen and I, who run Gosport together now, have been working on it for quite a while. We go to the Jobcentres; we go to the Two Saints. There are so many agencies, and we are getting together with the agencies. It is a community thing. This is so important. We have been fighting in Gosport to get the community to come together.

Chair: I think we understand. We love the passion that you have got, but I have to manage it to ensure that we cover every angle.

Q41 Mr Bain: Yes, that passion is infectious, and thank you for everything that you, and people like you across the country, are doing. Do you feel that if someone came to you with dyslexia, you would have sufficient understanding to pick that up and direct them to the specific help that they might need to overcome that?

Linda Curtis: Yes, we have tools. We have the filter papers. If it is somebody with learning disabilities, then I hold my hands up. We cannot do that. But this book has been

written especially for dyslexia. We have another example of a 41-year-old man who failed school because he had dyslexia and was pushed to the back of the class. He is now running his own business making leather shoes. He has built the skills up out of necessity, because he did not have the reading skills. Now he can read, he can have his own business. He can do his VAT; he can do his books; he can go on the computer and put out a website. He has done amazing things. Yes, we can, but not people with learning disabilities; it would not be an option.

Q42 Paul Blomfield: Tom, I was lucky enough to be invited by Unite and First Bus in Sheffield to go and see the Unionlearn work in the local bus depot in my city. I have to say, as somebody who was broadly aware of what Unionlearn does, I was knocked over by the range of things that were happening. I just wondered if you could share a little more about the Unionlearn programme with the Committee.

Tom Wilson: I would love to. It is interesting you mention Unite, because one of the things that breaks my heart is that you get acres of press coverage about Unite in Falkirk and nothing about the fact that last year alone, Unite will have trained 10,000 learners, many of whom did not have even Level 1 literacy and numeracy. The work that Unite, USDAW, the GMB and other unions do is phenomenal and never gets reported. I am delighted to have the opportunity to say something about it.

The reason it works is exactly what Libby and Linda have been saying. Our union learning reps, of whom we now have 30,000 trained up and down the country, do exactly this kind of peer-to-peer, “If we can do it, you can do it”. They are workers too, so it is dinner ladies teaching other dinner ladies, train drivers teaching other train drivers, and prison officers teaching other prison officers—and prisoners too, by the way. That model of peer-group learning is fantastically successful and very cost-effective. We have trained, I would guess, around 1.2 million learners over the last 10 years—probably more; that is a conservative estimate—at an average cost of £97 per learner, which is less than 5% of the cost of the typical FE student. I am not claiming that we do everything; a lot of our learners will go on to do FE, but it is a massive, cost-effective programme that is training over 1 million people. You can ask the question, “How do we train the next million?” We can do that in five years—much quicker—and probably at slightly less cost, but not a great deal less.

I would like to pay tribute to BIS for the support that they give us. Around half of all the learning that unions do is funded by the taxpayer through BIS; the other half is funded by unions themselves. The half that is funded by the unions is growing, because the whole operation is growing. It is enormous. Around 15% to 20% of everything unions do is now about learning. That is the way in which they can help their members to get on at work. A great deal of that is about workers who would otherwise never get off the churning around of moving in and out of low-paid jobs, which is bad for them, bad for the economy and bad for their employers.

That is what we do. We do it very well, and we are very proud of it. The reason it works so well is that it does de-stigmatise. Exactly as you were saying about prisons, if somebody cannot read at work, they are not going to tell their manager, but they will tell their fellow workers, because half of them probably have issues with literacy or numeracy. It is often astonishing to me that if you talk to people about their numeracy skills or maths,

they will say, “I have not got the faintest idea. I am absolutely useless at maths,” but, if you then talk about their payslip, which is complicated stuff to do with bonus rates, overtime rates, shift premia and six-week cycles of shifts, they have got it like that. They are astonishingly acute. They put me to shame when I am trying to understand it. Similarly, if you talk to people who go down the bookies and put money on horses, they will know the proportional odds. To my mind, contextualisation and de-stigmatisation—complicated words; simple concepts, in some ways—are the key to all of this. That is what we can do so well and so effectively.

Q43 Chair: Could I just put it to you that you devise a course for MPs to understand IPSA’s processes?

Tom Wilson: We would rise to that challenge, I am sure.

Mr Binley: It would be beyond your capability, I promise.

Q44 Paul Blomfield: Thanks very much, Tom; that was very helpful. Just building on that last point about contextualised learning, I am anticipating your answer, but what do you think is the best way of embedding adult literacy and numeracy in vocational programmes?

Tom Wilson: There are three things. The first is to treat the learners as adults. Very often, one of the reasons why it does not work is that they are not treated as adults; they are effectively sent off to the local college, and what the local college does, with the best will in the world, is put them back in a classroom. That is exactly the environment that failed them in the first place. That is the worst thing you could do. That happens a lot to 16 and 17-year-olds, who move on from school to college hoping that they will be entering a very different environment and knowing that they want to get up to Level 2 maths and English, but the college, with the best will in the world, is not really able to provide the different, more challenging, more interesting and more contextualised environment that treats them like adults. Very often, you find that those same 16 and 17-year-olds are disappointed and failing because they are not getting something that is different to what they have just had at school.

The second point I would make is that you do it at the workplace, so it is about the job, it is very contextualised and it is in familiar surroundings. Many workers will have enormous issues about their time. They may have caring responsibilities; they are often mothers—or, equally, fathers—who need to get home to help with their families. The idea that they are going to up sticks and go off to the local college and do something for two hours after having done their day shift is just not sensible. By far the most successful programmes are those where the learning is brought into the workplace and it is taught at the workplace in workplace surroundings.

The third point is exactly what Libby was saying about getting that programme of learning right so that you quickly start making advances. You do not do some great big chunky Level 2 or something; you do it bit by bit, just as David Hughes was saying earlier on. If you design those programmes right, then the learners are fantastically motivated, and it does not take long to release an enormous appetite for learning. The idea that these are people who do not want to learn is absolutely wrong. There is enormous appetite for it, and very quickly you can unlock that and employers see that very quickly. We work with

thousands of employers who are working very closely and well with unions to do all of that. Some are a bit sceptical to begin with. Do not get me wrong; not all employers think unions are wonderful. It does take a little bit sometimes to explain that this is rather different, perhaps, to what they would imagine. When you can do that, it does not half transform expectations and transform industrial relations. It unlocks all sorts of potential for employers and learners. Employers themselves begin to realise what they need to do to reorganise and improve the training in that workplace.

We also work with employers who are not already unionised. We are very happy to work with many employers who do not yet recognise unions, in the hope that we will encourage them to do so. On the point about supply chains and SMEs, Nissan, a big employer up in the North East, stipulated that any organisation that wants to be on their supply chain has to have at least Level 2 for all their employees. At a stroke, that is what any SME in the North East who wants to be on Nissan's supply chain has to do. It didn't half have a massively powerful effect. We have done the same with Rolls-Royce, with Bombardier, with First Bus, with Arriva—with many big employers that are unionised. That helps them to cascade their learning down the supply chain to SMEs that are not unionised. That is a big part of the solution to the SME problem that you rightly raised earlier on.

Q45 Mr Walker: You have partly answered my question already, which was going to be about different methods of teaching and what works best—the balance between formal training and classes, one-to-one, self-study, distance learning and ICT-supported learning. I very much recognise the point you made about people not wanting to be sent back to the classroom. Many people were very happy to leave school at 16 and go into the workplace, and do not want to look back from there. What role can the technological opportunities that are available and ICT-supported learning play in this?

Libby Coleman: I do have to remind people that if you cannot read, you cannot use a computer. I have to keep going back to that. After that, there are fantastic programmes now available for basic maths. It is that first thing that we have got to do before we can do that; after that, then we can go.

Tom Wilson: I entirely agree. What we have learnt is that, to put it very crudely, for the bottom 10% of learners who have no qualifications and low skills, and do not understand about keyboards and computers and all the rest of it, putting them in front of a screen is not the answer. You have to explain what it is all about first of all and get their basic skills up. Then, if you can get it right and contextualise it and introduce the whole world of ICT step by step in a way that is comfortable and that they understand, it really takes off. At that point, yes, blended learning and online learning really can be enormously effective if it is designed right. Learndirect, for example, have some really good programmes on this; so do Tribal, Edexcel and many other companies. We have around 500 learning centres in workplaces up and down the country. In those workplace learning centres, there will be typically a suite of computers with a number of learners who will do a couple of hours in their lunchtime or after their shift, just to get their skills up or finish off some modules, precisely because they have been introduced to that and taught how to use a keyboard, how to use a mouse, and so on. Once they have got the basics, they are off, particularly if they are working alongside their peers and if they are doing something that has got immediate practical value and they can see the use of it, either to help their kids with their homework—that is a very big issue, as Libby was saying earlier—or because it is something they need to get on at work, or just because they are interested.

Libby Coleman: Can I just say something about helping children with their homework? I really do need to take it back one step and say the reason why we have illiteracy is that those of us who can read—I speak as somebody who grew up in care and did not have parents—learnt the basics, the foundations and the decoding processes long before we came to school. When we come to school, the teachers will build on that. In a middle-class school they will take out the three kids who are dyslexic and give them one-to-one teaching and then move on; in a school class where the children’s parents have not been able to read with their children because they cannot read—they may not admit it, but they desperately want to, but they cannot—they will not. That is why a big target audience for us is the young parents, so that they can then read with their children so they do not have this problem when they hit the schools that then goes on and then we all sit here and go, “How did this happen?” We must do that. The only way we can do that is to hit those young parents so that they read with their children before school.

Q46 Nadhim Zahawi: Libby talked about the historical experience. We have had, during the past 10 or 13 years, a big influx of immigrants. What are the challenges around the immigrant communities who are coming to the UK in reading and writing?

Tom Wilson: This is a very interesting issue. English for Speakers of Other Languages, as it was traditionally taught, in some ways did not tune into the cultural and context thing enough. What we have found through our Unionlearn programme is that there are many workplaces that will be dominated by a particular ethnic group and where the ULR will be from that ethnic group and will have enormous credibility with their fellow workers, whether they are Somalis, Pakistanis or whatever they may be. Think of the rag trade in Nottingham. What is the best way to try to introduce those workers to English and to numeracy, which often go hand in hand? It is by beginning from their cultural roots. In other words, if it is about helping their kids to learn English, start there. If it is about issues to do with understanding the transport system or clothing or food or cultural things that they may have issues with, start there. If it is to do with family relationships or religion, start there. Whatever it is, you start there. We have developed programmes, and we have a great deal of experience of working with groups like that in ways that are tailored to their particular cultural milieu. That is what we find is most successful, and it works very well.

Libby Coleman: I can only say that the book could not be designed for people from a different culture. What we have discovered—and I think Linda can confirm this, as any of our teaching groups would do—is that if you can speak English, you can learn to read with *Yes We Can Read*. We have discovered that.

Q47 Chair: Could I just follow this up? You mentioned prison. I suspect that a very high proportion of the ethnic-minority people in prison—and I have no evidence base for this; you may or may not know more than me on this—would be illiterate and innumerate. Do you know of any course or book that would give the equivalent experience as yours? Could yours be adapted?

Libby Coleman: To teach English?

Chair: Yes.

Libby Coleman: That would be almost impossible, because there are too many different languages at the other end. That is the problem. That is why we say you have got to be able to speak fairly good English before you can learn to read, so it is one step further back.

Q48 Chair: That implies there is a gap there that needs to be filled if we are to address this particular problem.

Libby Coleman: Yes, but it is difficult to think how to do that particular thing because there are hundreds of different languages.

Q49 Chair: There are hundreds of languages, but I am willing to bet that you can address probably 70% of those relatively simply.

Tom Wilson: We have a programme in Glen Parva Young Offenders Institute, where the great majority of young people with literacy and numeracy issues—and these are 17-year-olds who cannot read at all—are working-class white from local council estates. What we are doing with them is giving them skills in logistics, which is how to get a job in a warehouse. There are union reps from the local Sainsbury's who go into that young offenders institute and will teach them how to drive a forklift truck and how to work in a warehouse, which is a complicated operation these days, if you think of Amazon and so on. To get those skills they have to learn, on the way, ICT, literacy and numeracy, all embedded together. They are far more likely to learn, because they can see the point of it, they are being treated as adults, it is contextualised, and they know it is going to help them to get a job on the outside. That is the kind of thing that we would advocate as being the most effective way to deal with the massive literacy and numeracy problems that there are in prisons and young offenders institutes.

Q50 Mr Walker: I want to come back on one thing Libby said that struck me very clearly, which was the issue around getting people to have books and the connection from that. I recently visited an organisation in my constituency that gives away free books. They take books that were going to be pulped by charities and they give them away. You can go in and pick them up for free. We often hear about these bookless households and so on. What can we do to raise awareness of the availability of books that people can get completely for free?

Libby Coleman: I seem to be on the same old track. There is an organisation run by Dolly Parton called the Imagination Library. She gives free books, which are remaindered, to all families in areas of deprivation—I think she started in Bradford—when children are born. The family receives a pack. That is fine if the mother and father, or guardian or whoever it is, can read. It comes back to the same thing. We went and saw Dolly Parton's representative in this country and said, "Look, get the parents reading. Get this in there first," but she was very much focused on children only and did not feel that that was her thing. That is an example. We have to get that first step in, dead or alive, and we need to find strategies to all work together to get that particular thing in first before anything. That really does not require years of training as a teacher or anything; what it needs is fantastic people like Linda and everybody to come forward and to take somebody and spend three months—a bit longer in some cases—teaching them to read.

Q51 Mr Binley: Tom, I was a member of USDAW—I worked for the Co-op Bank—and I am genuinely delighted to learn of the work you are doing. It seems to me that there is a real connection with what Libby is doing. It equally seems to me that there is a real connection between those SMEs not in supply chains that we are not getting to and with the LEPs. Let me expand this just a little. Libby and Linda will remember *Workers’ Playtime*.

Tom Wilson: I do, actually.

Mr Binley: You will not; you are too young, Tom. Sorry, ladies. I just wonder whether there is a connection there with the opportunity to learn in the workplace on a “workers’ learn time” basis. I wonder if we might think about ways that we could develop that. Would that have relevance, do you think?

Tom Wilson: In a way, that is exactly what we do. Take Tesco, which has a programme called Check Out Learning for people on the checkout. USDAW negotiated with them a national agreement, which includes things like, if you do a couple hours at the end of your shift, one hour is paid for by Tesco and the other one is paid for by the learner. In those two hours, you do something at work in the Tesco learning centre, which may be about trying to move off the checkout job into something a little bit better paid or better qualified, or may be to help you with your ICT skills to help the kids with their homework. It could be 101 different things. It is exactly that idea, but the key to making it work is the agreement between the union and the employer to begin with, so there is a collective, 50-50 buy-in: “We do this; you do that. This is what it is all for, and this is how it is all organised.”

Q52 Mr Binley: I understand that. I wonder whether we could use the local enterprise partnerships. There is a real need within business to improve these basic skills. Is there a structure that we might use with your two minds put together that could develop that with those SMEs that the unions do not really reach? I know you would like to.

Tom Wilson: We are working on it. There are many SMEs that are unionised, partly because they can see the advantages of accessing union learning, sometimes through a supply chain. To come back to your LEPs point, in principle I would agree. The practical problem is that, to be honest, so many LEPs are still struggling to really find their feet and get established, and are not yet adequately resourced.

Mr Binley: Come to Northamptonshire; we will show you how to do it.

Tom Wilson: We work a lot with LEPs and we are trying to help and support them as much as we can, but I think they would say themselves that they need more support and help to be able to effectively work with SMEs and so on. Big employers like Tesco can make a big difference.

Q53 Mr Binley: I think there is something we can record to work on there that is really practical and gets right down to where the problem is. We hear all the talk from the educational establishment, which flies above the problem.

Libby, you have got a joke in your book. Could you tell us the joke and what its purpose is?

Libby Coleman: There are jokes and riddles all the way through the book. This is a critical thing. There are a large number of people, particularly in the adult world, who think they have learnt to read but have not learnt to read for meaning. In other words, they have learnt to make the sounds and they are ever so pleased, because they can take a book and they can make the sounds; what they have not done is that next stage, which is to connect what the word actually means. There is a whole tranche of people out there who are barking at print. That is why I keep saying “reading for meaning” like that, because it is critical that the coach makes sure that the learner knows what they are reading about. For that reason, we have some very corny, very silly jokes. We have riddles to ensure that if they have not discussed the reading material, they will talk about the jokes.

If I may very quickly tell one story, I was invited to Gosport, where they were receiving a cheque from the Lottery to support this project, to pay for the books so that people could go into the community. The fantastic MP they have got in Gosport came to pick up the cheque. I spoke to her there. Just before she arrived, a very formidable and elegant Scottish lady, who quite by chance happens to be here, with something of the Jean Brodie about her, was sitting with a rather rough and tough learner. He came from the sort of background you would expect. I thought, “Gosh, those two together. Whoa.” I heard raucous laughter. The joke was, “Why has Noddy’s hat got a bell on?” In the book, it says, “Because he is a plonker”. It is practising “-er”. The raucous laughter was because her learner had said, “I know that joke. It is because he is a wanker.” I cannot tell you how my heart sang. At which point Caroline arrived, may I say; I hope she did not hear it. The point of the story is that the learner has understood what the learner is reading. That is the critical point.

Mr Binley: Thank you for that. Can I just warn you when you read the report, it will be six asterisks in that particular place?

Libby Coleman: I am sorry about that.

Q54 Chair: One of the great things about Select Committee questions is you never know where they may take you. Tom, you are frantically signalling. Do you want a last word?

Tom Wilson: I just want to make two very quick points, if I may. The first one is about JCP. I know you have got somebody from DWP coming to the next evidence session. The 16-hour rule being waived in the Autumn Statement was fantastic. That is very welcome indeed. That will help a great many trainees and learners. I just wonder if you could ask them: what about the eight-week rule, which currently prevents anybody who is doing a work placement for more than eight weeks from continuing to receive their benefits? There are many other benefit rules that need to be waived, softened or amended in order to help people who are currently stuck at home watching daytime TV because they cannot get off benefits to be in a position where they can learn. Marrying together the learning regime and the DWP regime would be enormously helpful. That is point number one.

Point number two is that, much as I said earlier on that we are grateful for the funding that we receive from BIS, which we are, it has cut it. Our funding has been cut by about £2.5 million so far this year; it could be more. That will directly result in thousands fewer learners in the workplace than would otherwise have been the case. I entirely understand the

pressures on the public purse, but I would just like to take this opportunity to put on record the fact that we do think it is a real mistake.

Chair: No true union representative could forgo the opportunity to state their case on the most public platform available, so congratulations; well done for doing that.

Libby Coleman: Can I add to that? We can tackle this problem within communities. It is possible to go to your local Tesco, your local Lloyds Bank or your local Lions group, and say, “Can we have £500 to put *Quick Reads* into the library so you can just pick them up? Can we have a couple of thousand pounds so that we can take this book and teach everybody that we can get hold of?”

Chair: I think we get the message. I do need to move on. I would emphasise what I said to the previous panel: please do put any further comments or evidence that you think would reinforce the points that you have made here in writing to us. Similarly, we may feel that we have got some questions that we should have asked but did not, and we will put those to you. Thank you very much. It has not only been helpful; it has been inspirational as well.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Di Lloyd**, Principal, St Vincent College, Gosport, **Jez Langhorn**, Senior Vice President, Chief People Officer, McDonald’s, and **Neil Couling**, Director, Work Services, DWP, gave evidence.

Q55 Chair: Good morning, and thank you for agreeing to speak to us. I was slightly nonplussed for a moment, because I had not realised you were waiting outside. You will not have had the benefit of hearing some of the other questions. Can I welcome you and thank you for agreeing to speak to the Committee? We are slightly running behind time, so I will crack on, but could you just introduce yourselves for voice-transcription purposes?

Di Lloyd: I am Di Lloyd. I am Principal of St Vincent College in Gosport.

Jez Langhorn: Good morning. My name is Jez Langhorn. I am a Senior Vice President and Chief People Officer for McDonald’s in the UK and Northern Europe.

Neil Couling: I am Neil Couling. I am Director for Work Services for the Department for Work and Pensions. Basically, I run Jobcentre Plus.

Q56 Chair: The first question is to you, Jez. Can you just tell us what work McDonald’s does in helping staff to develop their literacy and numeracy?

Jez Langhorn: To give you some context, McDonald’s has 1,250 or so restaurants in the UK and we employ 97,000 people, predominantly young people. If we are not the biggest employer of young people in the country, we are one of the biggest. We offer a range of qualifications as well as training and educational opportunities to our people. In the last five years, our young people have earned over 16,000 Level 2 apprenticeships worth five GCSEs grade A* to C. As part of that, they have also achieved over 20,000 Level 1 and

Level 2 qualifications in numeracy and literacy. These are people who did not have those qualifications before. Our hiring process means that we hire a broad church of people. We have a lot of students who work for us and a lot of people who may be studying for a degree or have a full-time job, but, equally, many young people who did not do so well in traditional academic qualifications. We think it is right that big employers like McDonald's offer those opportunities for young people to gain those qualifications once they have left the traditional academic route.

Q57 Chair: Is the training focused on your business needs, or is it more demand-led?

Jez Langhorn: We have always had a pretty good track history of developing and training our people. McDonald's spends £43 million a year on training and developing its people to upskill them but also to support our business and our customers. The academic elements of the apprenticeship are layered on top of our traditional training. When it comes to maths and English qualifications, we work with learndirect and City & Guilds to deliver those, because those are not core skills of our people. We partner with industry-leading experts to deliver those qualifications to our people on top of that training that we do.

Q58 Chair: To get it clear in my mind, you have your basic training course, which is focused on your obvious business needs. You mention apprenticeships. Does the basic training that you have incorporate that apprenticeship course, or is the apprenticeship over and above it?

Jez Langhorn: If I can take you through what an apprenticeship is at McDonald's, it takes a minimum of 12 months and often a lot longer, and it is comprised of the training that you need to do your job well in all areas—it could be customer service, hygiene and food safety or team-working skills. Added to that, there are written elements of reflection that apprentices do as part of their apprenticeship and, if you do not have a Level 1 or Level 2 maths or English qualification, it includes those as well. Those are the extra bits that are added on to the core training that you would receive at McDonald's to do your job that, combined, produce the apprenticeship.

Q59 Mr Walker: I have two very quick questions related to things that arose from earlier panels. Some of the feedback that we had was that the focus on Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications misses a lot of people out at the bottom. Do you recognise that there is a need for some entry-level help in some cases? Is that something that McDonald's has a policy towards?

Jez Langhorn: Some of the people who come to us who do not have even a Level 1 qualification will struggle even to get to Level 1 and they will need additional support and help to get there, which we would provide through learndirect, although I have to say most people who come to us would achieve at least Level 1, if not Level 2, numeracy and literacy.

Q60 Mr Walker: The Unionlearn representative in the previous session was talking about Nissan working with its suppliers to require certain levels of training and support. Does McDonald's have any relationship with suppliers with regard to the training they

provide? I visited a local McDonald's restaurant in Worcester and I have been very impressed with the training you provide to your own staff, but do you look beyond what happens in the business?

Jez Langhorn: We certainly influence our supply chain in terms of their people standards. We do not have a direct requirement, but, for example, we work with 18,000 British and Irish farmers, so there are many small organisations that supply our business and we certainly would encourage that across the supply chain. Something that we can look at for the future is applying minimum standards in that supply chain.

Q61 Chair: You have talked about your apprenticeships. In your written evidence, you have said that “adult literacy and numeracy programmes are currently delivered through our apprenticeship programme. We have previously delivered them more widely, but we have had to limit it to apprentices in the short term while we establish our relationship with learndirect. We hope to widen the programmes again imminently.” What was the problem with having it more widely delivered whilst you were engaging with learndirect?

Jez Langhorn: It was purely their transition from a previous supplier—the education provider of those maths and English qualifications to learndirect. As part of that process we had to just limit the numbers to aid the transition. We are now just starting to open that up. Most people would do a numeracy or literacy qualification as part of their apprenticeship. There are a much smaller number of people who would just want to do either the numeracy or literacy outside of the apprenticeship scheme, and we are just starting to open that up to them again now.

Q62 Mr Bain: Neil, there are many social and health issues that Jobcentre Plus pick up. In a constituency like mine, the Jobcentre Plus is almost the first Government agency that an unemployed person will have contact with, so in a sense you are the gateway for dealing with a whole range of issues. How successful do you think Jobcentre Plus is at picking up on issues of literacy and numeracy skills gaps that people have?

Neil Couling: You are right in saying that we are often the first people to have contact. In one sense, we have, in the last two years, referred over half a million people into skills provision. The question I have asked of my own organisation is that we seem to be seeing people again and again, so people are going into that referral and they are not turning up or they are coming back out again and are still manifesting the same problems to us. We are quite good at identifying the problem; we are less good at following through and making sure that the problem is addressed.

Q63 Mr Bain: Where is the breakage in the chain? Is it that Government needs to do more at every tier? Particularly in Scotland, there will be split responsibilities whereby the UK Government has some responsibilities and the Scottish Government and local authorities have others. What, in your view, is the way to try to get around this problem between the diagnosis of literacy and skills gaps and filling them for jobseekers?

Neil Couling: There are issues right through the process, I would say. For example, you will see us bringing in more of a mandatory nature to this—which is quite controversial in some areas—because of the failure of people to turn up to the provision that is on offer. That is quite controversial. You will see that we are trying to intervene earlier to spot the problems—to try, in our original diagnostic work, to identify things earlier. You will see

as well that we are piloting some approaches. Whilst identification of the problem in terms of literacy and numeracy is a problem—you can just see in the employment outcomes of people who have those problems, they are so poor—in the academic area here, there is not a consensus about which interventions will solve the problem. Instead of rushing to a silver-bullet solution as a Government, we are doing a fair bit of work piloting and trying to understand which interventions will work here. This is not a new problem; it has been going on for a while. A number of countries have this problem; the UK is not alone in having these particular problems. For the devolved Administrations, we do work quite well, certainly in Scotland, with Skills Development Scotland. We have partnership arrangements there to work with them. We have tried to bring the various agencies together there. I do not think that is a major issue. Our real problem is that we do not know what will solve the issues for the individuals, which is why we are piloting.

Q64 Mr Bain: Yes. It is a huge challenge. If I can address this question to all of you, and if we turn specifically to the work that BIS can do to support adult learners and also employers who want to work with their staff to gain further literacy and numeracy skills, what do you think are the approaches that BIS should be looking at? In the past there were things like individual learning accounts, which provided an incentive, in a sense, for both sides. Have you any thoughts on what policy answers we need to meet this challenge?

Di Lloyd: My first answer would be around consistency of funding streams. For example, the project that is featured in the paper that you have got—our Out There project—is subject to bid funding. We had funding for the first three years of that project, but then, although the project was clearly successful, had to re-bid for funding. We are employing people on fixed-term contracts because we are not sure whether the funding is going to come through for the following year. It is very difficult to make sure that we get the right people—the good, well-qualified staff who are able to teach on the courses that we are offering, particularly the literacy and numeracy qualifications—and are able to offer to our community a continuity of those courses going forward. That would be my first input.

Jez Langhorn: For McDonald's, we are very pleased with the support that we are getting. Our education programmes go back over five years. I would just echo the point around continuity. We have an annual agreement with the Skills Funding Agency, who have been very supportive, as has BIS, but that is only an annual contract now, so McDonald's takes on a proportion of risk with the teams that we dedicate to this and the contracts we have with suppliers, etc. That has not been a problem so far, but it is something that we perhaps consider is a longer-term outlook on that support going forward.

Neil Couling: To start with a positive, the thing I think has got better over the last decade, certainly since I have been aware of these issues, has been the working of Jobcentre Plus with the colleges. We are much better now on our side at laying down what we think we need, and the colleges have proved to be much more flexible in making provision. If I think of something like English language skills, almost before you get to Level 1—much as the question you asked Mr Langhorn—a number of colleges have for us been putting on short, effectively diagnostic, courses that then allow you into English as a second language provision. That is something I would want to deepen even further going forward. I am not an educationalist; I do not know what interventions will work to help people get numeracy and literacy skills, but I do know that Jobcentre Plus and the colleges working together is producing some more effective interventions.

Di Lloyd: If I can come back on that and give you an example of where we have worked with Jobcentre Plus in Gosport, prior to a new Tesco opening in the Rowner regeneration area of Gosport, we worked with Jobcentre Plus so that the long-term unemployed were able to access courses to support them so that they were able to apply for the work in the new Tesco. That was an example of a successful collaboration between the two.

Q65 Mr Bain: Do you think there is sufficient capacity out there to deal with the scale of the literacy and numeracy skills gap that exists?

Neil Couling: There is certainly sufficient capacity within my organisation to identify the people who are manifesting with these issues.

Mr Bain: But to solve the problem.

Neil Couling: I honestly would not know. It is not my sphere or area.

Q66 Mr Bain: Would any of the others like to express a view on that?

Jez Langhorn: Having what we would call at McDonald's a blended learning approach—a supportive learning environment at work—is really important. We find that a blend of people being able to access provision online as well as on the telephone, with the support of a mentor in our restaurants, works well for young people. It is a supportive environment that seems to work well and allows people to achieve qualifications that they have not had before. Whatever needs to be looked at, the online provision, given the scale of the challenge that the UK faces, would have to be a part of it.

Di Lloyd: As has been referred to in earlier submissions, one of the issues is the availability of qualified particularly maths teachers. I am from a college where all students who are 16-plus who have not already got GCSE at grade A* to C in maths and English have to continue with those courses. Our college has always persuaded our students to continue with literacy and numeracy if they have not already got their GCSE in maths and English. Certainly there has been a huge growth in the number of young people doing those courses at 16 to 18. Therefore, the difficulty is that people are being drawn into the under-18 teaching areas and, even for under-18, you have got lots of people who are non-qualified teaching particularly maths. Therefore, for adult numeracy, potentially you have got that real skills gap.

Q67 Ann McKechin: I wonder if I could just come back to Neil Couling's remarks. Mr Couling, I represent the adjoining constituency to Mr Bain's and in our city we have one of the worst records in terms of both literacy and numeracy. I was somewhat surprised about the fact that there does not seem at the moment to be any attempt by the DWP to start to assess your capacity requirements if you start to move to a system of greater compulsion. You referred to the number of repeat cases that you have through your system. These are likely to be the ones who are least removed from formal education. Is there going to be any attempt, first of all, to assess what capacity you are going to require to meet the new proposals made by the Government, particularly in areas such as our own city, where we have a very high number of people within that group? Secondly, is there going to be any study about whether a move to greater compulsion as opposed to voluntary motivation—which is what we have been talking about today; where people have volunteered for help and

assistance—where people are compelled to go to courses is going to achieve a greater educational result?

Neil Couling: Let me start with the current capacity question. What I was trying to answer there was the question about whether I have a capacity issue in terms of my ability to refer people into provision, to which the answer is no; I do not have a capacity issue there. I was at the Work and Pensions Select Committee a few of weeks ago explaining some of our plans to implement all the new things that the Government is asking of Jobcentre Plus, which begin in April 2014. We are implementing them in a staged way in April 2014. There is a whole series of different changes coming in there. My confidence level is pretty high that we can implement all of these things effectively. We are dependent, down the line, on some information-technology changes and so forth, so we are managing those all very carefully, but as of now, I do not have a capacity problem bringing the changes in. Are we monitoring and evaluating the success of greater mandation? That is one of the purposes of the two pilots we will be running. We will be mandating new claims in one pilot, and then mandating people who have been unemployed for more than six months in the other variant there, and trying to judge, again, whether mandation is an effective way of raising the standards of participation and, by inference, the outcomes from that.

Q68 Ann McKechin: You have not announced where those pilots are going to be.

Neil Couling: Not yet, no.

Q69 Ann McKechin: I am sure we will watch that with interest when it comes, because sometimes pilots are in places that do not seem to be where the greatest challenge might be. We will see where those are.

Could I come back to Mr Langhorn? What literacy and numeracy skills do employers require, from your own experience? What is the minimum that employees need to offer? Are you having to make up the gap when people are coming into your organisation?

Jez Langhorn: We do not set a minimum standard when we hire people. We hire them on their qualities, not their qualifications. We are looking for people who have a strong propensity for customer focus, etc, then we will add in those qualifications for them should they want to do them, so it is not compulsory. What we do find, though, is that as well as giving them the formal qualification that stays on their CV, it is a really big confidence builder. It is not just about being able to read, write, add up, multiply and understand your mobile phone contract; this is just the confidence that that gives you as well. We have got examples of people helping their children with homework who could not help them before, or reading bedtime stories. That has a really dramatic effect on their lives, from their skills but also their confidence. It is a really important part.

Q70 Ann McKechin: So you have staff who are more productive and motivated.

Jez Langhorn: Absolutely, yes.

Q71 Ann McKechin: Mr Couling, do you have any remarks about your own experience of what employers are looking for?

Neil Couling: It depends on the nature of the job. If I take a standard job, and especially if we focus on young people for a second, they are looking for people who understand the routines and regimen of work. They are looking for a basic set of skills. They are looking for some desire to work in that particular area. Clearly, as you move up the jobs on offer, they may ask for specific skills, but, in my experience, most employers are looking for somebody who is keen and who has the kinds of skills this inquiry is looking into.

Q72 Mr Walker: Di, can I ask you to talk us through the headlines of how the Out There initiative works?

Di Lloyd: Yes. It is probably another blushing time for Caroline. St Vincent always did deliver courses within this particular area of Gosport, but at times when funding starts to reduce, colleges look to their outgoings and start to pull things back in, quite often to their main sites. Four years ago, there was a particular site in the community where we were delivering courses that was about to close, and therefore we were looking at whether we could afford to continue to deliver things there. At that time, Caroline really got involved with the college. There was a big regeneration project in the area, and it was really about what the area needed. This community provision was vital to what was going on in the area. She worked with us to see how she could help us to obtain funding for this. It was that bashing-heads-together moment that came when she put us together with Hampshire Learning so that we could obtain funding and find new premises within the area that enabled us to set these courses up.

The other difference was that it enabled us as well to design different types of programmes, which were very much first-steps-to-learning programmes. Earlier on in the submissions, we talked about how you identify people with the particular needs that we are talking about. This is about encouraging them to come through the door. This is about people who have got such negative views or have got so many barriers to coming into learning. The first place that we delivered from was a community centre that is next to the infant and junior school, near to a youth club and near to a Sure Start centre—it is right in the centre of that area—and we offered courses in things like jewellery-making, scrapbooking, and buying and selling on eBay. It did not matter what the courses were. They are free, because we got the funding for it. There is free childcare involved. It is afternoons and evenings. It was around getting them through the door on to short courses to demystify it and not make them embarrassed about coming through the door. The really important part of this is to look at, when that course finishes, having information, advice and guidance—having that support interview and that discussion with that learner to find out what they might progress on to. It is about identifying possible progression routes following on from what they have just started on. That might be the point when other learning needs are found. That was something that started four years ago and we now deliver from 15 different centres. It has been a fantastic success. When we have the open days, they are really queuing to get into the place to find out what is on offer. As I say, it was around finding that right link-up at the time that made that possible.

Q73 Mr Walker: You talked in your written submission about embedding the literacy and numeracy skills into those courses. With something you mentioned, like jewellery design, or cake decorating, which sprung out at me from our brief, how do you make sure that that is bringing in an element of numeracy and literacy?

Di Lloyd: As you will have seen, my own background is maths. You can put in maths by stealth pretty much anywhere, really. With something like cake decorating, there are amounts to calculate. You will identify people who are struggling to work that out. You can do proportions, because they might not want to make the amount of icing in the recipe. There is a huge amount. They need to read how to design the cake decoration, to pick that particular one. Similarly, in buying and selling on eBay, first they have to be able to use the computer—I suppose that is the starting point—but there is numeracy involved there in the bidding process on eBay and so forth. It is not too difficult to bring in some very basic numeracy and literacy. That might be the point where some real difficulties are diagnosed as well.

Q74 Mr Walker: The number of people you have got signing up and coming through the courses is impressive in and of itself, but do you have an evidence base in terms of the level of improvement that has been delivered?

Di Lloyd: The level of improvement is more difficult to measure. In terms of progression, just under half of those students progressed on to other courses last year. Of the 1,000 who came through the door, just under 500 progressed on to other courses. Hampshire is quite keen on the detail of the progression statistics, particularly when you are bidding for future funding.

Q75 Caroline Dinenage: We talked about the fact that the Chancellor has announced a new post-Work Programme, which is coming into force in April. I noticed in your submission that you say that “skills conditionality policy allows Jobcentre advisers to refer claimants, on a mandatory basis, to further careers advice” and to identify where relevant skills are a barrier. That begs the question: if the Chancellor’s new post-Work Programme is identifying serious weaknesses in the existing system, what has been happening to unemployed people in the last three years who have not had the literacy and numeracy training that this should have signposted them to?

Neil Couling: In answer to Mr Bain’s and Ms McKechin’s question in terms of the mandatory approach we are taking, I said that previous approaches of just submitting people to provision have not been working, because, of the referrals we make, only half are turning up for the provision on offer. I have probably got the figures somewhere. Between August 2011 and August 2013, we submitted 500,520 people to skills conditionality training, and there were 239,680 starts. That is the reason why we are moving into mandation with a greater intensity. People’s claims are getting longer; they are going into the Work Programme and they are coming back out of the Work Programme still with these issues, and very often these are the barriers to them getting employment; 60% of people with no basic skills are unemployed. It is a startling statistic. We know that fact; that is why, in terms of the policy design, we are toughening the regime.

Q76 Caroline Dinenage: How does one of your Jobcentre Plus staff identify whether somebody needs training in literacy or numeracy?

Neil Couling: We do it in two ways, a bit like Ms Lloyd was saying. We will ask people to complete forms. There is a little test for a dummy job that we would ask people to fill out. You can see then whether they have got problems writing, reading or understanding,

and in that there are numeracy questions as well. We have got a screening tool as well that sometimes we will use, or the claimant will just say to you, “I cannot read and write” straight out. At that point, you will refer straight into provision. It is a bit of using one’s judgment for that individual. Some individuals will not want to admit they have got problems, and we will spot it like that by running a series of tests in the Jobcentre; or the person will say that they have got this problem and we will make the referral straight away.

Q77 Caroline Dinenage: There is huge pressure on Jobcentre staff, as there is on a lot of people at the moment. People who have difficulty with particularly literacy become very creative in learning how to hide that problem. How do you ensure that your staff do not get waylaid by the person who says, “I have forgotten my glasses. Can you fill out that form for me?” How do you ensure that things like that get spotted and people do not just ignore that?

Neil Couling: My staff are quite experienced, so they are used to some of these tricks. The other thing is that policy is helping us. For example, we are currently rolling out the claimant commitment, which puts the responsibility in the Jobseeker’s Allowance regime much more on the claimant to prepare material beforehand and bring that into us and then work off that material with us in terms of agreeing a claimant commitment. The way in which policy is moving is helping us be better at identifying these problems. In the past, people have been allowed to cycle round the system without these issues being identified, which is what I answered the first question on. We admit that, and we are trying to do something about it, because we know the importance of literacy and numeracy in helping people get a job and then progress within it. Again, the figures for progression in work once you have got these skills are much stronger as well.

Q78 Caroline Dinenage: You talked about the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into Jobcentre Plus. They found that Jobcentres applied very varied approaches to assessing claimants’ needs; that there was no systematic assessment of basic literacy and numeracy at the new claimant interview stage; and that the fund of money that was available for paying for skills training, including literacy and numeracy, was very inconsistent in how it was used and there was very little transparency on how it was spent. That suggests to me that there is huge inconsistency across the country as to the way that this issue is addressed by different Jobcentres. How do you bring that consistency in?

Neil Couling: I am not sure I accept what the Committee said in that respect. When I gave evidence to them, what I was trying to get across was that it was not a question of one process here working for everybody. People manifest in Jobcentres with different issues. Sometimes, as I said, people will disclose facts to you; sometimes it is going to take three, four or five interviews with them before you spot something or before they are prepared to accept something like that. I was saying to the Committee that in the system, some variation is an advantage to this. We tried a system years ago that was very regimented and put everybody through a process, and the Committee here today is seeing some of the consequences of that. In that respect, with the greatest respect to the Committee itself, it got some of that judgment wrong on this. It is true to say that I have put some flexibility into the choices that advisers can make, precisely because I do not think from the centre of Whitehall I can instruct everybody on every case exactly what to do. Some district managers have chosen to use that money more extensively in the sphere of basic skills

provision; others are investing more money in different parts of their own local economy to do things in different ways because of the judgments made locally about the specific need in those localities. If that Committee wants us to run a monolithic service down the line, it is at liberty to say that; I just think the outcomes from that will be less optimal than allowing some local variation and people to make judgments locally about what is needed in those localities.

Q79 Caroline Dinenage: How do you measure the outcomes? How do you measure the progress that is being made from taking a more bespoke approach?

Neil Couling: Our prime measure is off-flow from benefits. Our off-flow from benefits is currently running at a record rate in terms of success for the organisation. We have just had the fastest fall in unemployment in 17 years. We think this approach is working very well at the moment. We are measured on our ability to get people into work and get people off-flowing. The Work and Pensions Committee would like me to have a prime measure of everybody into work; we would like that too, but until we had in real-time information from HMRC, we cannot easily measure moves from benefits into work without causing a lot of hassle for employers, which we do not want to do, because the employers might not then want to work with us as closely as they have over the last few years. It is a bit of a debate we are having with the Committee about when you switch to measuring by job outcomes. At the moment, we do it through off-flow.

Q80 Caroline Dinenage: So, because somebody has got work, you take it to mean that they have addressed their literacy and numeracy issues, when that may not necessarily be the case.

Neil Couling: The primary responsibility of my organisation is not to address literacy and numeracy issues. We neither make nor do not make that conclusion. We are judged on whether we get people effectively into work. Clearly, there is a public policy responsibility on what happens to that individual in work and how they gain more skills—and, by gaining more skills, they will progress in work—but the narrow responsibilities of Jobcentre Plus stop at that point.

Q81 Caroline Dinenage: So it is a Jobcentre, not so much a Jobcentre Plus.

Neil Couling: The “Plus” was the last Government’s attempt to bring in people who were not narrowly on Jobseeker’s Allowance and to expand the services of Jobcentres to look at people on Employment and Support Allowance and Income Support. The responsibility for skills and the success of skills provision is not something that falls within our ambit. We work very closely with that sector, but our responsibilities do not extend into it.

Q82 Caroline Dinenage: You do not see that, by addressing people’s skills issues by signposting them correctly, you could be saving yourself a bit of work down the line when they move on from maybe the short-term job that they have got.

Neil Couling: Absolutely. Skills issues are an impediment to getting a job, which is why we are trying to make the correct referrals into the skills system. All I was saying was that the outcomes from that are not our direct responsibility, but we are very interested in the quality of what colleges are providing and whether they are meeting these particular needs

because of the cycling problem and also the fact that if people come, for example, out of an English as a second language course back to us and still cannot use English to the extent to which they can get a job, that is a real issue for us. We are interested in that respect; I am just saying we are not accountable for those sorts of issues.

Q83 Ann McKechin: One of my local Jobcentres when they are dealing with long-term repeat cases say that when they try to address people's issues with numeracy and literacy, the most frequent reason given is that the person is dyslexic. What are you going to do when people declare themselves to be dyslexic in terms of how you are going to deal with the issue of compulsion? That signifies that they may have a disability. How are you going to deal with that?

Neil Couling: Again, we are not responsible for addressing that issue. If you ask me, if that is manifested back, whether that then leads to a sanction, the statistics on the sanctions we make would show that there is a fair amount of judgment made around following up, where there is already some conditionality in the system, about that.

Q84 Ann McKechin: Your staff are not qualified to tell whether someone is dyslexic or not.

Neil Couling: Indeed.

Q85 Ann McKechin: Would you be then proposing, if there is a move to greater compulsion, to move someone who says, "I am dyslexic", to an assessment to determine whether that is indeed the case?

Neil Couling: Sometimes we refer people straight into training. For about 450,000 cases over two years we have referred people to what we call an initial provider interview, which is basically a screening process for that individual. We do not say to everybody, "Right, you have got to go into this particular course and do this". In a lot of the cases, we are not certain, so we send them off to the colleges, effectively, for a diagnostic interview there. I would assume that what would happen is that those people who said, "I am dyslexic" would be sent for one of these diagnostics about what is the correct route for that individual to follow in terms of addressing the issues that they have got.

Q86 Ann McKechin: Right. So they would be assessed by someone who is a professional and knowledgeable in dyslexia.

Neil Couling: Yes.

Ann McKechin: It is a complex area and diagnoses are not simple.

Neil Couling: No.

Q87 Mr Bain: There is a nagging concern that is shared by more than one member of this Committee about the gap that exists. As you have said, Jobcentre Plus will be able to identify cases of skills gap, whether it is literacy or numeracy, but where is the capacity going to exist to deal with and provide a solution to that skills gap? Let me just give you some reflections from my constituency. In Glasgow North East there are anywhere between 600

and 800 individuals who are either long-term youth unemployed or long-term unemployed having been out of work for two years or more. You have got to consider that a number of those individuals will have significant skills problems. You may be able to diagnose those skills issues, but where is the capacity to deal with them? The college in my constituency, Glasgow Kelvin College, has had its funding cut by the Scottish Government by a considerable margin. Where are the resources coming from to meet this skills gap that you say you can identify?

Neil Couling: I do know that there have been some issues in Scotland with the provision of resources to do some of this. What my district managers have done in Scotland is use some of the flexibility I was talking about previously to supplement some of that provision by buying some extra courses and places for that. There is a limit to what we can do. It is called the flexible support fund. My managers know that this is a key issue for jobseekers in being successful in their job search. Ultimately, again—this is not me copping out—I am not responsible for the funding of the education sector. We will use what resources we can and we will be as creative as we possibly can, but if there are gaps in provision in a locality, then Skills Development Scotland in the first place would be responsible for answering some of that. We will do what we can with the limited resources that we have got as well to address the issue. We are in partnership here and we think that this is a really important thing for us to be tackling.

Q88 Mr Bain: So it would be fair to say that if there is a move towards compulsion in terms of the Work Programme, there will have to be very important and significant discussions on funding held between the Jobcentre Plus network and the DWP in terms of what is available.

Neil Couling: There will be a debate anyway, I would expect, between the Scottish Government and the UK Government about the nature of compulsion in Scotland—there normally is—and, indeed, there will be discussions about how much money has been Barnettised through in terms of the provision there. That is one of the reasons why our initiatives are starting in England in the first place: to allow us some time to discuss with the Scottish Government what the exact arrangements will be in Scotland.

Q89 Mr Bain: Have they been proactive enough in coming to the DWP and saying, “There is a demand in Scotland to deal with these skill gaps in areas of high unemployment and high deprivation”, such as those that I represent? Have they been doing enough to bring that to the attention of the DWP?

Neil Couling: I do know there have been a number of discussions on these matters, and indeed we continue to discuss with them as part of the plans to implement this across the whole of Great Britain.

Q90 Chair: If a claimant who is seeking employment cannot read and write and cannot find a job because of that, how long do they have to improve their skills before they lose at least part of their benefit?

Neil Couling: The system does not work like that. It is not time-limited.

Q91 Chair: Can you explain how the system will work to deal with a person in that situation?

Neil Couling: In theory, when we identify the problem, we refer that individual either for the initial diagnostic, as I was saying to Ms McKechin, or straight into provision if it was accepted that this was an issue. That person would then proceed through the skills system—through the college—attempting to learn the skills and make the kind of progression they need to be a viable jobseeker. If they did not turn up for that provision—say they just said, “I am not engaging with the system”—then sanctions could be applicable; we could sanction their benefit for not attending provision designed to give them the skills.

Q92 Chair: Somebody who was unco-operative could lose their benefit quite quickly.

Neil Couling: Yes. We would then keep referring them to the provision, because we do not want to sanction them; we want to get them to take up the provision and acquire the skills, so, essentially, they could go through a series of engagements with us designed to get them to comply and take up the course and hopefully do well at it.

Q93 Chair: If they took up a course and completed it, but still seemed not to have developed sufficiently to acquire a job, what would be the situation there?

Neil Couling: One of the first things we would do is talk to the course about the individual concerned. I was in Margate Jobcentre on Friday and I was asking exactly that question: “Are people cycling round the system and coming back to us?” Quite encouragingly, what the people in Margate were saying was, “No, it is not the case; people are coming back improved.” Because we are seeing these individuals every two weeks as well, we are checking it. I said, “Can you see progress? Can you see people improving in and around some of these issues?” That is what the advisers were saying to me. In theory, I suppose you could refer them around again, but you would have to talk to the college about, what the issue is. Has this person got other issues that are preventing them from acquiring these skills? What is going on?

Q94 Chair: Could you give any sorts of statistics of the numbers who come back and need to be re-cycled through the training process? Not necessarily off the top of your head; if you could write to us, that would be helpful.

Neil Couling: The way you would find this most easily would be by looking at the people returning to us from the Work Programme—they are people who have been on benefit for three years who have probably been through some form of basic skills provision there—to see whether they are still manifesting with problems. I will go away and see what I can produce.

Q95 Chair: If you could provide that evidence, that would be very helpful. We have run over time. I wish to terminate the questioning now. On the previous panel—unfortunately I do not think you were in to hear—the Unionlearn rep outlined a number of ways in which he felt that the benefit rules could help adult training and literacy. Off the top

of my head, I cannot remember exactly the points he made, but we will pick those up and put them in a letter to you and would welcome your comments on them.

Neil Couling: I would be very happy to respond on that. I wondered if you would ask me about that today, and, luckily, there is an exciting long brief on what the rules are.

Chair: Yes. In general, I realise that with time constraints we may not have asked all the questions you would have liked to answer, and, equally, there are answers you may have wished to add to. Please feel free to supplement any verbal evidence that you have given today in any written evidence. Again, we may feel that there are further questions that we would like to ask you, which we will put in written form and would appreciate your response to. Thank you very much. We do appreciate your contribution.