



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Apprenticeships and traineeships for 16–19 year olds](#), HC 597

Wednesday 14 January 2015

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Education \(AAT0073\)](#)

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Members present: Mr Graham Stuart (Chair), Neil Carmichael, Alex Cunningham, Bill Esterson, Pat Glass, Siobhain McDonagh, Caroline Nokes, Mr Dominic Raab, Mr David Ward.

Questions 384 – 484

Witness: **Nick Boles MP**, Minister of State for Skills and Equalities, Department for Education gave evidence.

Q384 Chair: Good morning, Minister. Welcome to the Education Committee. We are concluding our inquiry into apprenticeships and traineeships for 16 to 19-year-olds. We have relatively limited time, so we will try to break our normal pattern and be succinct in our questions, and we know that you will be commendably succinct but substantive in your answers. What is the greatest challenge in the 16-to-19 apprenticeship sector?

Nick Boles: I think we have set ourselves a difficult but not impossible challenge in government, because we are attempting to improve the quality of apprenticeships and increase the quantity. That is a difficult challenge, of course, but on the other hand it is the challenge that every single successful business in the UK manages to meet—they improve the quality of their products every year, they tend to lower their prices and they tend to sell more. It is achievable, but it does make it difficult, because obviously an increase in the quality can mean an increase in the cost of providing the apprenticeship, and we are trying to do that at the same time as increasing the number.

Q385 Chair: If you had to choose between the two, what is the biggest problem with 16-to-19 apprenticeships, in particular? Is it the number offered or is it the quality? I am not suggesting that you are choosing only one.

Nick Boles: No, it is a fair question. I would say that the biggest current problem is quantity, partly because we have already gone a long way to improve the quality via the reforms that we have already implemented.

Q386 Chair: What percentage of 16 to 19-year-olds—the whole cohort—do an apprenticeship, and how does that compare with our key competitor nations such as Germany, Austria and France?

Nick Boles: That is an extremely good question. I am not sure whether I know the percentage and how it compares. If I don't get it fed to me, I will write to the Committee. We need to make sure we are comparing like with like. Different competitor nations, even those close to us in continental Europe, have very different systems of education and apprenticeship provision. The bald figures might not be as instructive as we think but, nevertheless, I would be happy to write to the Committee.

Q387 Chair: Thank you. On the quality issue, the apprenticeship vacancies website has an advert—or had one in the past few days—for a customer service apprenticeship in a central London restaurant, for which the responsibilities listed are seating customers, taking orders, serving food and drink, promoting special menus and dishes, and delivering excellent customer service at all times. Should that be an apprenticeship?

Nick Boles: Certainly it is absolutely right that there are customer service apprenticeships. On the other hand, we want to ensure that every apprenticeship has proper, rigorous content and requires a substantial amount of external training, as well as an extended period of on-the-job experience.

Q388 Chair: In what way does being a waiter require those things? In what way is a complex and extended period of training necessary in order to seat people, promote dishes and be nice to the customers?

Nick Boles: Mr Stuart, I have to say that I disagree with you. You could say the same about working in a shop.

Chair: You could indeed.

Nick Boles: And the truth is that being a successful retailer, which includes the people actually on the floor of the shop—although that is not what “shop floor” normally means—absolutely requires a set of skills that you need to acquire. Some people are naturally blessed with them and some can develop them without training.

Q389 Chair: Of course there is a set of skills that you need to acquire but, going back to the fundamentals, it is not—I haven't got the exact phrasing of the Richard review in front of me—long, complex and substantial. If you are management and you are managing the team, stock and financial flows, of course that could be, but on the idea that being the front-of-house person in retail or a restaurant would fulfil the requirements that Richard set out, and which I understood the Government also set out, of being a substantial and income-transformative set of training—without which training you would not be able to do it—I don't think that it does so at all.

Nick Boles: I disagree. The truth is that every apprenticeship needs to be at least 12 months and every apprenticeship will end up having its framework replaced by a trailblazer standard that is developed by the industry and approved, and that has proper assessment at the end. I can promise you, Mr Stuart, that there are people at the front of house of restaurants who are poached from one restaurant to another and are paid phenomenal amounts that would compare happily with the salary of people sitting in this Committee, because they are excellent at their job. I don't think we should belittle customer service roles.

Chair: I am not.

Nick Boles: Where I think you are right is that any apprenticeship needs to be substantive, rigorous and last at least a year. As you put it yourself, it should have a transformative effect on the ability to do the job and command a wage for it.

Q390 Chair: A transformative effect on income.

The point is not about the value of the training. There are many relatively short courses that can be income-transformative. Being income-transformative is a necessary part of an apprenticeship—it should be in my view—but, separately from that, an apprenticeship is also required to be long term—a minimum of 12 months—and to include a substantial, complex set of skills needed in order to do a job. You will find that with many of those people who are crossing from restaurant to restaurant because they are so good, it was not because they needed substantial levels of training to reach that level; it is because they happen to have the personality and aptitude for it. I put it to you that this is simply not suitable—it is not what the public understand to be an apprenticeship—and the failure to recognise that is one reason the apprenticeship brand has such low traction with parents.

Nick Boles: Although I entirely agree with your broad argument, I think you are underestimating what has been achieved. In the past five years of under-19 apprenticeships, the number that last more than 12 months has more than doubled—it has gone from 53,000 to 117,000. That is a substantial achievement. There were indeed lots of low-quality short apprenticeships that were, frankly, a bit of a fraud. They were not really what an apprenticeship is meant to be; they do not exist any more.

You have singled out a particular framework that you were sceptical about. We are subjecting all frameworks to some pretty rigorous testing. Actually, the quality has improved dramatically in those apprenticeships and we must continue to insist that an apprenticeship is all the things you have just said. I just don't entirely buy, although I am happy to look in detail at that framework, the suggestion that I thought you were making: in and of itself, a

customer service role in a restaurant or shop is not capable of being a worthwhile apprenticeship, because I think it is.

Q391 Bill Esterson: Developing the ability to run a restaurant, shop or business is a complex and lengthy process that would lend itself to an apprenticeship. However, for a single role within that, people come to work and learn how to do a job after a short amount of training. When does training end and apprenticeship start?

Nick Boles: That is a very important point. We must not fall into the trap that politicians always fall into of redefining terms so that they lose all meaning. We were in danger of that under the previous Administration. Because you could do an apprenticeship without having an employer and do it in a few months, we had frankly got to the point where we had pretty much undermined the whole value and meaning of an apprenticeship.

We have said—it is arbitrary, but with a reason—that an apprenticeship has to last at least 12 months. It has to be a job, you have to have an employer, and it has to have some rigorous and substantive content involving substantial off-the-job-training as well as on-the-job work.

As we roll out the trailblazer programme, that requirement is becoming less crude and more detailed. I have rejected quite a number of trailblazer standards that have been brought to us for approval, on the advice of the panel, because they were not demanding enough. That process is going well. We have already approved 73 or 74 trailblazer standards. We have roughly the same number going through the process. In time—over the next two or three years—we hope to replace all the old frameworks with trailblazer standards. At that point, I think they will all be able to pass muster.

It will be the case that some old frameworks are still being operated. Yes, they might last more than 12 months, but on close inspection you, and indeed the panel, might conclude that they are not sufficiently rigorous. I think it does need to be more than 12 months. As you say, that does not mean that short courses are valueless.

Q392 Chair: No, but they should not be called apprenticeships.

Nick Boles: No.

Q393 Bill Esterson: You mentioned what happened when the current Government came in. Do you regret—do you think it was a mistake—re-badging Train to Gain as apprenticeships? Do you think that created a false impression of what was going on?

Nick Boles: We have been on a journey as a Government. We have tried to do the tricky thing of both increasing numbers and improving quality.

Q394 Bill Esterson: So that was a mistake.

Nick Boles: I will say it the way I say it and you, Mr Esterson, can ask it the way you want to ask it. I think we have been on a journey. We have been trying to improve quality and numbers, and we have achieved both, which is a pretty good place to end up after four and a half years.

Q395 Mr Raab: Minister, on the ONS data, quite a large chunk of the growth in apprenticeships has come from those who are already in work or are over 19. To what extent do you think that the fact that the 16 to 19-year-old cohort has not kept pace with that growth is a reflection of either the appeal of the apprenticeships to that group, or their appeal to employers? Which is it, or is it another third factor?

Nick Boles: That is a very important question. Underlying growth in apprenticeships for 16 to 19-year-olds has been quite impressive. By underlying, I mean taking into account that we have weeded out more than 40,000 that were frankly not going to meet our minimum standards of being 12 months and the like. Given that we have made them much more demanding, the growth has actually been quite impressive, but obviously the headline figures disguise that.

Why has the growth not been more impressive? That is because if you are asking people to take somebody on as a full, proper employee for more than 12 months as an apprentice, that is quite a tough ask for an employer. If you are particularly asking them to do that with somebody who is 16, 17 or 18 who, by definition, probably has no prior experience of the workplace, it is perhaps an even bigger ask for the employer. That is probably the main source of the fact that we have not had a tripling of the number for 16 to 19-year-olds, because it is a challenge for employers.

Having said that, entirely coincidentally, on Monday I was with Richard Harrington in Watford at one of the best apprenticeship providers in the country, a firm called 3aaa. It focuses on IT, accounting and digital apprenticeships, and deals only with 16 to 18-year-olds. It is outstanding on every measure. It is the first apprenticeship provider to be rated outstanding on every measure at its first inspection by Ofsted. It is actually finding huge demand from employers, almost all of them small and medium-sized businesses, so it is possible to sell an employer quite a long and rigorous programme by showing that, nevertheless, this person will add value to their business. The firm is demonstrating that across the country; it is in Watford and lots of other places, too. This is possible and it is experiencing a lot of growth. We need to learn from such companies how to expand the scheme.

Q396 Mr Raab: On the underlying growth—I paraphrase in my words, not yours—of the quality apprenticeships for 16 to 19-year-olds, do you have any data you could send us that would back that up?

Nick Boles: Yes. I am never very good at finding numbers at short notice. The number of what we call full apprenticeships for 16 to 19-year olds—basically more than 12 months—has doubled from 53,600 to 117,400. The overall number has gone only from 116,000 to 119,000 because we have weeded out about 47,000 low-quality apprenticeships—ones that were less than 12 months.

Mr Raab: Thank you.

Q397 Bill Esterson: Do all those have work placements?

Nick Boles: No, they do not have work placements, because they are jobs. Under this Government, unlike under the previous Government, you cannot be doing an apprenticeship unless you have a job with an employer.

Q398 Bill Esterson: Well, I could introduce you to some people for whom that is not the case.

Nick Boles: Just a little note on this; it is incredibly important. The Government do not own the trademark “apprenticeship”. We decide what we consider to be an apprenticeship and we offer funding—taxpayers’ money—for it. Lots of other people call something an apprenticeship. We cannot stop them; we cannot sue them for libel. So we need to be very careful that, when we are judging anything that the Government support as an apprenticeship, it is a job with an employer that lasts for longer than 12 months. Sometimes it is more than one employer, but you definitely have a job with an employer.

Q399 Mr Raab: On weeding out and quality, we have had evidence in differing language and terms from City and Guilds and the Gatsby Foundation about the varied quality of the level 2 schemes. Most young people are starting apprenticeships on level 2 schemes. Do you think that that is an area where the proliferation of apprenticeships has diminished their currency? Is there more work to do on it, given the point you made to my earlier question?

Nick Boles: Obviously we would all probably like to see more growth, with the most growth, and therefore most taxpayers’ money, spent on apprenticeships at level 3 and above, but I do not think that we want to discount entirely the value of level 2 apprenticeships. BIS published a research paper on 10 December that looks at destination data in terms of the economic benefits of an apprenticeship. It is important to know that people who have completed level 2 apprenticeships have on average 11% higher earnings three to five years after their study than the control group of people who have not. That is dramatically better than for people who completed a level 2 FE course that was not an apprenticeship and did not involve an employer, so I think they do have value, although I am not saying that all of them have value, and weeding out those that do not is what the trailblazer programme is about.

Q400 Mr Raab: So is the emphasis on beefing up the quality of the lesser performing level 2s or paring them back? That is what it sounds like you are saying, although I do not want to put words in your mouth.

Nick Boles: It is the former. I want to weed out the ones that are low quality. I do not want to say that you cannot do a level 2 apprenticeship. If it is going to add 11% to your earnings, yippee. I hope that everybody will always be encouraged. You will often find that

they will come in, do a level 2 apprenticeship and then go on—they will not just stop there. The best thing to do is to segue seamlessly into intermediate and higher apprenticeships.

Q401 Caroline Nokes: Looking at the reforms that the Government are bringing forward to the apprenticeships schemes, concerns have been raised with us that they might provide a disincentive to employers. Are you concerned that employers might get fewer benefits from the reforms?

Nick Boles: I may take a little longer over this than I generally would, Mr Chairman, because it is a very important and big question. The fundamental recommendation of the Richard review, which we entirely endorse and are determined to implement, is that we need to move to a situation where employers control the purchasing power that Government offer for an apprenticeship, so we put money into an apprenticeship to pay for the training, and we want employers to pick and choose between providers.

We have conducted a number of consultations on this and looked at different ways of doing it. Most recently we looked at a PAYE model and an apprenticeship credit model. The concerns that were raised were ones that I thought were important for us to listen to, which were that either of those models might be off-putting, particularly to small and medium-sized businesses that do not want to get involved in a huge administrative process, and perhaps do not have the cash flow to be able to bankroll the training and then get their money back from the Government. That is why we have today published the response to the consultation saying that we are not going to pursue either of those models. I am absolutely confident that we can come up with a system that puts the purchasing power in the hands of employers, but leaves the administrative and regulatory burden with providers. Providers are full time dedicated to doing this and know about the ILR records and satisfying the Skills Funding Agency, so we need to leave all that work with them, while giving employers a greater ability to shop around.

The second part of the reform is this idea that employers should, ultimately, be making a contribution through not just employing the apprentice, but the cost of the training. That is important, but since being appointed, I guess I have added one little note of caution on that. I am very worried that if you have never done apprentices before and you immediately have to start writing cheques, my ability—and the ability of whoever is in my job after the election—to persuade employers to come forward and start doing apprenticeships is going to be quite tricky. I am keen in this reform—it is what we are working on at the moment—to find a way to ensure that we don't make apprenticeships off-putting to people who have never done them while, over time, expecting employers who are getting strong benefits from apprenticeships to make a contribution to the cost of training. That is what we are going to try to achieve.

We are not going to rush into anything that puts off small electrical contractors, small building firms or whoever else it is from doing apprenticeships. We are not going to make it burdensome administratively and bureaucratically, and we are not going to start asking for money before people can see the benefits of an apprenticeship to their business.

Q402 Caroline Nokes: Would it be fair to say that you are committed to ensuring that neither employers nor young people disengage from apprenticeships?

Nick Boles: Absolutely. If we introduce a reform that leads to the disengagement of either employers or young people, it will have failed—I will have failed.

Q403 Chair: I congratulate you on having listened to employers and so many people who have said to not push ahead with the original ideas, but in terms of not putting people off, one of the things putting them off at the moment is the uncertainty created. Because of the other reforms that you are not slowing down, there is uncertainty. Can you say something about that? What are you going to do to stop people being put off taking on apprenticeships, and instead looking ahead to take on apprenticeships next year, when they don't really know what the system is going to be?

Nick Boles: That is a very fair concern to raise and it is one that I am keeping a very close eye on. It is important to say that there is absolutely no pause in the apprenticeship programme and people are still doing them in very good numbers. They are mostly still happening under the old frameworks and funded through the old system, but there was never going to be a point at which we turned off the old system and turned on the new one. It was going to be a gradual bringing in of the new system of trailblazers and of a new funding model.

Q404 Chair: So to employers who may feel an uncertainty, which may be unfounded, what would your message be?

Nick Boles: It is that there would be an absolutely seamless transition between the two systems—the current system and the new system. Nevertheless, I accept one problem with having said, “No we are not convinced by the two ideas,” is that people will then say, “When are you going to come up with something?” All I would say is that we are working flat out and I am quite optimistic that we will be able to come up with a very simple system for the routing of funding through employers that meets the test that I have set. We are working flat out to try to do so.

Q405 Chair: Do you accept that there can be a problem with the Richard principle that you laid out, which is the idea that somehow you have got the employer selecting? That may be true of the big employers which naturally engage with the likes of Richard and everyone else in apprenticeships, but for many small employers, the only reason they get involved in apprenticeships is because the provider comes along and sells it to them. The whole idea of this market dynamic is the wrong way around. You are actually going to someone with a tiny number of employees who needs someone to come along and eyeball them, tell them why it would work and maybe introduce them to someone in the like field so that they can believe it.

That is a very different dynamic from the employer sitting there surveying the market. Isn't there a danger that it could lead us to the wrong conclusion, especially when you said at

the beginning that the top priority is, while maintaining quality, to increase the quantity? If we are going to do that, we have got to do it through SMEs.

Nick Boles: You are right about the process, which is that for many, particularly smaller, businesses, it is the provider who actually gets them to sign up to the programme in the first place. They don't therefore start out thinking, "We want to do apprenticeships; let's shop around." We all know that in lots of other walks of life, even if it is the case that we all have an inbuilt inertia—we stick with our existing mobile phone suppliers, electricity suppliers and the like—it is useful to have a system whereby you can shop around. Perhaps, once you become a customer, you are a bit grumpy about the way that the provider is behaving—it might be being inflexible or you might not feel that the training is good enough. We want to make it very, very easy and automatic for you to be able to see what else is out there, who else can provide the same standard, how they would structure it and whether it would be more flexible and more or less expensive. We are trying to enable employers to switch, if they want to, and to check. Often, they may not switch, but at least they can check. That is what creates—

Q406 Chair: But it must not get away from the central objective, which is to get the 91% of organisations that do not have apprentices now to start taking them. If you remove the drive from the very people who are most likely to get them to do it, you might be improving something else, but you are making that worse.

Nick Boles: Agreed. Of course you are right about that. That is the central objective. However, the old system was not producing the improvements in quality or numbers that we wanted to see. It didn't necessarily deliver the goal—in fact, it definitely didn't.

Chair: But as Conservatives—to make a party political point—we should recognise that, just because something is wrong, that doesn't mean a proposed change is going to make it better.

Q407 Mr Ward: Good morning, Minister. Was there not a suggestion that employers should be given the option to transfer the administrative burden to providers?

Nick Boles: Yes. There are two ways in which things work currently, which enable employers to avoid having to take on a major administrative burden. First, there are the apprenticeship training agencies, which are effectively umbrella organisations that take on the apprentice and place them with one or more employers. They manage the administration, pick the provider and all that. Secondly, as you say, some—in fact, many—of the providers themselves handle all the administration with the Skills Funding Agency; the individual learner records and the like.

I am absolutely certain that we can come up with a system that allows both those models to continue, while nevertheless giving the employer greater control over the Government's money and the ability to switch to another provider, if they want to. I see no umbilical linkage between where the administrative burden sits and who actually gets the Government's money or spending power.

Q408 Chair: Get that in place before 7 May.

Nick Boles: I will do my best.

Q409 Pat Glass: Minister, it is really good that you are taking the time to think about it. We have not come across anybody, so far, who is in favour of the implementation. In any market, there has to be demand and a supplier or a provider. Are you taking into account in your considerations whether there will be providers and whether you are driving providers out of the market? I had an interesting conversation with a college principal this week who, unfortunately, had had to cancel courses because she didn't have the staff to deliver them due to one member of staff leaving and being attracted somewhere else in very shortage markets. We talked about the issue of getting the skills right. Even before getting the skills, you have got to have some way to provide them. She said to me that, as the economy improves, colleges and providers cannot keep staff—they don't hang on the backs of doors. There is a danger that if you take the funding away from the providers, we will start losing some of our best providers. Is that part of your calculation and thinking?

Nick Boles: I am very much aware of the challenges that colleges, in particular, are facing with staff recruitment and retention, especially in relation to English and maths. We are rightly—most colleges entirely agree with the intention behind Government policy—being more demanding about people's continuing study of English and maths if they haven't achieved satisfactory GCSE grades at school. That has created issues. Concerns haven't been raised with me about that being a particular problem within the apprenticeship programme.

Q410 Pat Glass: The issue was around engineers, in the case I was looking at.

Nick Boles: There is a general problem, as we know, with a shortage of teachers who are able to teach science, technology, engineering and maths subjects. There is a huge sort of bidding war going on, and as you say, at the same time, you have got—thankfully—the economy growing and engineering doing particularly well. That bids up the prices as well.

Q411 Pat Glass: You put into that uncertainty in the system, so college principals do not know whether they are going to get apprentices or whether this is going to fall, you are going to start losing the people who are going to provide for your—

Nick Boles: I don't think that I accept that the idea—so long as we have a predictable amount of money committed to the apprenticeship programme, and it is one of the few parts of further education where we have seen growth and, certainly, where my party is committed to further growth in the next Parliament. So I think that we will have the certainty that Government money is being invested in apprenticeships and that the FE colleges that are doing a good job—many of which do a good job—are in a very good position to remain incredibly important providers. So all I am really suggesting to them is, so long as you can go out and win that business, much of which will stay with you—because, frankly, as Mr Stuart

said, if you are a company and you are getting a very good service from your local college in doing your apprenticeships, you are not going to want to go to a whole effort of changing provider. You are only going to do that if you are worried that the service you are getting is not good enough.

Q412 Pat Glass: But even within that existing envelope of the money remaining the same wherever it is—this college principal was saying to me, “Am I really going to put money into getting an engineer when I have no guarantee that I am going to get those apprentices? Why would I not put money into hairdressing and beauty, where I know I am going to get students?” That is going to have an impact on the quality.

Nick Boles: I am sorry to hear that from—

Pat Glass: Take it into account when you are doing your thinking.

Nick Boles: I do take it into account, but I have to say that the best principals are the ones who see where is the greatest demand in the economy for skills, and they invest in putting themselves into the position to supply that. Engineering skills have a far greater demand in the economy than any other area, so a good principal in almost any part of the country is thinking, “I’m going to make sure I can win a very substantial chunk.” Remember, the Government’s business is only a small part of it. There is a huge amount of private sector investment in skills training, and engineering is a critical component of that. I think good principals are beefing up their capacity.

Q413 Bill Esterson: You reminded us earlier that an apprenticeship is a job. The question that sprang to mind is, you have got providers who take apprentices on and then match them to employers. I have come across people who have started with a provider and they are not able to get a job—these are unquestionably Government-backed apprenticeship schemes, as you said—and weeks and months later, people are still not able to get a job because of the provider’s difficulty matching up and finding an employer. How can you improve this engagement with employers, so that more of them are prepared to take apprentices, so you do not have this kind of problem? Earlier, you were saying that is not a problem.

Nick Boles: If you give me the details of that provider, I am going to come down on them like a ton of bricks, because frankly we should not be paying them money to fund an apprenticeship if there is no job attached. Yes, of course, providers quite legitimately will take the role of matching up recruits to employers, but if they are not succeeding in finding employers, they should not be taking on people and claiming they are apprenticeships, and they certainly should not be getting money from the Skills Funding Agency for doing so. That is incredibly important. What matters is getting more employers to—

Q414 Bill Esterson: Exactly. That is what the Chairman was asking you. So what is the answer there?

Nick Boles: Exactly. So there are a number of strands of activity. One of those interesting questions is, what is it that actually gets somebody who is very busy and running a small business to think, “Yes, okay, I’m going to do this.” We have, firstly, financial incentives. So we have the apprenticeship grant to employers, which you know about: the £1,500 that you get if you are a smaller business and you have not done apprenticeships before. We have additional funding to ensure that basically the full training costs of a 16 to 18-year-old—an under-19-year-old—are covered by Government funding. So there is, as it were, a financial set of incentives.

There is then the data. If you look at the data about people who are currently involved in the programme, it is overwhelmingly positive: 70% of employers said it improved the productivity of their business—the product or service quality of their business. There is an incredibly high rating from existing employers.

Then there is this thing of communicating the benefits to employers, because they can actually get really good young people to come in through an apprenticeship. They can get them early and—let’s face it—they can get them reasonably cheaply, because the apprenticeship minimum wage is lower than the standard minimum wage. They can then train them, so they do not just have an abstract qualification; they have a qualification to work in their business and really understand how the theory fits their business. We have a major marketing programme. It is one of the few that the Chancellor has agreed to fund. I think that it has had a great deal of success at persuading both young people that this is a good option and employers that this is something they should be looking at.

Ultimately, we all have a responsibility. I wrote to every Member of Parliament recently with a guide to how they can get involved in persuading employers to do it. The thing that I have found striking is that since July, when I was appointed, I have not met a single business that has said, “Yes, we used to do apprenticeships, but we stopped.”

Q415 Chair: I have.

Nick Boles: That’s interesting; I would love to find out why. It is incredibly rare. We all have a role to play. We have an Apprenticeship Ambassadors Network. There is a fantastic man called David Meller, who—entirely unpaid—is running round the country seeing every employer he can find, big and small, to persuade them to sign up to create apprenticeships. It is working but, as the Chair pointed out, we have a long way to go. We have roughly 10%; that leaves 90%.

Q416 Bill Esterson: I am not sure that one person running round the country is quite going to—

Nick Boles: It is not one person. He is the head of a network. There is a network of people all around the country.

Q417 Chair: Is the National Apprenticeship Service doing a good enough job? In the numbers we have seen, they contacted 180,000 small businesses and led to the creation of

more than 1,200 new apprenticeship opportunities. That is less than 1%. I do not imagine that the training providers are hitting a much higher percentage of conversions than that, or they would not be in business.

Nick Boles: The National Apprenticeship Service is absolutely doing a good job. Ultimately, the question is: what are you selling? That is where the Government's reforms come in. If people do not see why an apprenticeship will add value to them, they may not sign up to it. That is why we have the trailblazer programme, which means that we can go to employers and say, "Your competitors or other people in broadly the same industry as you created this standard. It has not been created by some civil servants or educationalists; it has been created by businesses working in the sector. It's been approved by professionals from the Government and elsewhere. It's got an assessment at the end of it that will tell you whether they really have these skills."

That is not the only reason that we are doing it, but it is part of sending a message to industry and to employers that these are really high-value things. Similarly, the idea of giving them control over the Government's money is another part of saying, "This is something we really want you to do, and we're willing to back you to do it." You cannot blame or, indeed, put responsibility on any particular organisation. Everyone has a responsibility to try to get this to grow. But I sense that it is something that people talk about more; maybe that is just because I am now doing the job.

Chair: Probably.

Nick Boles: But not unrelated to what has happened with university tuition fees, I think that more young people are now making a genuinely neutral evaluation of whether they see greater benefit in making a huge investment in a university degree up front without any income, and then hopefully getting to pay it back over time, or in doing an apprenticeship where they can earn a bit, get their training and still end up with a degree if they want to go on to a higher apprenticeship.

Neil Carmichael: I wanted to ask about the forthcoming new careers and enterprise company and how that fits in.

Chair: We are coming to careers later, so we will have to leave that.

Neil Carmichael: That fits in to the question of promoting apprenticeships and what role you see that having.

Chair: Minister, we will come to that later. Sorry, Neil.

Q418 Bill Esterson: You made the point about an increase in desire among businesses to take on apprentices—and I would agree with that—but, like the Chair, I also know businesses which used to have apprentices, going back quite a few years, and they say that it is just not possible. While the desire appears to be there, employers—particularly smaller ones—are, for some reason, not turning that desire into a reality. When I was in Germany, two years ago, businesses there were saying that even sole traders were taking on apprentices because they have the infrastructure to support it, but it just doesn't seem to be

possible here. That is a step change that would really deliver the ambitious vision that, to be fair to you, you have set out.

Nick Boles: We all spend our lives saying, “If only we were like Germany,” in various respects—football, not least, where we talk about youth training and young people not having to play competitive matches. We do the same about apprenticeships and further education. They have a tremendous system—it is hugely admirable—but almost no element of it is importable to the UK. They have a whole system for business and Government that I suspect for many, not least of your political persuasion, is an incredibly attractive model, but it is much more regulatory and there is much more compulsion on businesses to get involved in various different ways—to join their local chamber of commerce, to take on responsibility for investing in skills, to take on responsibility for apprenticeships. That is not a model that we have in this country, and it is quite hard to see how you would import it.

We operate in a much looser system, in which we believe that the way to get people to create apprenticeships is twofold. One way is to communicate to them the advantages to them as a business of doing so. In a very competitive world, when there aren’t enough people with engineering skills or the basic skills to support engineering, it is an easier message to sell; it is a way of grabbing people early and training them into what you want them to be.

Also, unlike lots of countries, we put a lot of Government money into paying for the training. We say to employers, “We accept that a public good is being created. You may not hang on to this employee for very long, but by having helped them to complete an apprenticeship, you have created a public good to society.” That justifies a substantial public investment. We are looking at an ideal of two thirds of the cost of training. That is what will always be proper for the taxpayer to fund; if it is for a 16 to 18-year-old, it will be much closer to 100%.

That is our system, and we have to work within our system to make the incentives stronger and make employers feel they have control, but not to make them feel as though they have a huge bureaucratic burden. That is what the reforms are intended to do. I don’t think that we can realistically think that we can import an entire economic model, however admirable and successful, from elsewhere on the continent.

Q419 Bill Esterson: Although it is an economic model that we had a big role in setting up after the second world war.

Nick Boles: Yes, you might say that. It probably has deeper roots in culture and society.

Q420 Bill Esterson: It is a combination, yes. One concern SMEs have is that they do not feel included, not least in setting standards. How do you change that and make sure that they feel that they are involved? Is that not crucial? If you want SMEs to take apprentices, don’t they need to feel part of the process?

Nick Boles: It is important. There is a tension, obviously, because bigger businesses and bigger employers will often find it easier to allocate somebody to go to the meetings to

create a trailblazer standard. On the other hand, we are insisting on making sure that for every trailblazer standard there has been a strong opportunity for small and medium-sized enterprises in that area to have been able to input and say whether the standard that has been developed is going to work for them. If it doesn't, it will make the problem worse rather than better, and we will end up creating an unfair competition in favour of big businesses.

We are very much focused on that. We have some trailblazers that have been dominated by SMEs—for example, there is an electro-technical standard for maintenance and installation electricians that has been developed entirely by SMEs, although I accept entirely that that is relatively rare. We are ensuring that the SME involvement is there in every single trailblazer standard and that they cannot just be cooked up by the big employers.

Q421 Bill Esterson: Will you tell us how you are engaging with smaller businesses—is it with individual businesses or with representative organisations?

Nick Boles: A bit of both, but it is mainly with individual businesses. Representative organisations have great merits, but in terms of the practical application of an apprenticeship standard, I would want to know that a business that is out there every day—

Q422 Bill Esterson: Of course, but the concern is that one business in one part of the country could be completely different from another, given the nature of the small business sector.

Nick Boles: In every case, if there is an association, they will have an opportunity and will be encouraged to comment, but I am just saying that I do not know if I think that is sufficient. I would want to see some people who are actually running a shop to say whether this works or not.

Q423 Mr Raab: In October, the Government talked about the 700 employers who had signed up to produce 76 standards for the trailblazers. There has been some concern about the challenge of ensuring that the proliferation of trailblazer standards does not dilute the consistency and quality. The Federation for Industry Sector Skills & Standards gave us some evidence on that. I wonder how many standards you think there should be at the end of this process and how you will find the right balance. Do you have any thoughts on that at this stage?

Nick Boles: I do not like the idea of me, as a politician, saying that there should be 1,000 standards, or 400 standards, but I think it is an absolutely proper concern that we must not end up designing things of such specificity that either they give people skills that are not really transferable, or they relate to jobs that may not exist in four years' time, because the economy changes so quickly.

What we are always keen to do—we have been talking recently to the UK Commission for Employment and Skills—is check how this maps against the occupational roles as commonly accepted. Obviously, that is itself a fluid thing that is open to debate, but it is just about making sure that we are not ending up with too many very tightly defined roles

having their own standards. I think it is a sort of push-pull tension. It should bubble up from below—that is the whole point of the trailblazer standards—but we must permanently be alert to make sure that it does not end up creating something that is not sufficiently general, because we are putting a lot of public money into this, so it has to have a broader public benefit and not just a benefit for a very particular company or industry.

Q424 Mr Raab: I understand your reluctance to be a politician saying that there ought to be this number. On the other hand, in October, the Government made a big hoo-hah about championing the fact that there would be 76 new standards, so I wonder whether there comes a point at which you think you can predict the balance rather than prescribe it. If the answer is, “Not yet,” fine.

Nick Boles: I am guessing it is a few hundred—I am vaguely looking around behind me at the people who really know.

Mr Raab: They are smiling.

Nick Boles: We have 73 standards approved and more than 100 in development. We are still very much in the first quarter and not into the middle, so I am guessing it is a few hundred. I am very happy to come back to the Committee with a slightly more considered response.

Q425 Mr Raab: It is just this balance between, as you say, the flexibility and the range, with standards, quality and consistency.

Nick Boles: But what we want, and what I promise you we will achieve, is many fewer standards than we inherited. There is an unbelievable proliferation and that is wrong, because it militates against the idea that these are transferable skills with a lasting value. So we will have fewer, but I will come back to you with a bit more detail on how many.

Q426 Mr Raab: Just in terms of the model, the Doug Richard review said fewer standards but with core standards and then options, and that was very much the model in his approach. Do you see yourself sticking to that? Do you feel that you are amending or revising that, and again, how do you make sure that in the search for the requisite flexibility, which we all understand—you want to make this about demand—you do not end up diminishing their currency?

Nick Boles: I think that that is an ideal. Different people take different approaches. I am inclined to take, first, a fairly pragmatic approach and, secondly, an approach that trusts a group of busy employers to know what is going to work for them or not. To give another example, there has been a very strong emphasis on the idea that there should be graded assessments at the end of an apprenticeship, and I think that is an entirely proper and right principle, which we should stick to. But there have been some examples of particular apprenticeships in particular industries, usually involving some kind of a safety regime, where they have just said, “No, it’s just not appropriate.” Nobody getting into an aeroplane wants to be told that their plane’s safety was checked by someone who got a C in aeroplane

safety. I am paraphrasing, but that has been the broad gist of it. My view has been that I completely buy that there are certain exceptions.

We need to have a pretty clear idea of what we think in general will be good, but let us not be overly militant on insisting on it in every case. The key thing is that it is not just one employer. If one employer is cooking up something, we should be a bit more suspicious. If it is a group of employers—remember that the standards go to our panel, and the panel decides whether they meet all the tests—and the standards have gone through all that process, I am not sure that I am the guy who should be saying, “I disagree.”

Mr Raab: We will try not to be too militant.

Q427 Bill Esterson: How will you assess the quality of apprenticeships in the future? I am particularly thinking of the outcomes for young people. Some of the evidence we have heard suggests that there is a danger for small firms that, with bureaucracy, they might lose sight of what they are there to achieve on the quality of outcome for young people and what they are trying to do with the apprenticeship.

Nick Boles: I am not totally sure that I understood that, but let me have a go and please come back if I have not understood what the concern is. With the new trailblazer standards, there is an end-of-apprenticeship assessment. I have been very much emphasising to the team that that assessment is critically important, because once there are lots of trailblazer standards, the Government will not be able to check that every single apprentice has met our view of what a worthwhile scheme is—

Q428 Chair: Why would we believe that employer ownership, which could be said to have been raised by Richard and also by the Government as a bit of a dogma: “If only the employers controlled it more, we would have higher quality.” Why would we believe that? There will be a tension between some employers who do not want to raise quality and have transferability and someone—

Nick Boles: No, but that is why every standard has to be created by a group of employers, and not by an individual employer. We have to be persuaded that there is an assessment process and a solution as to who will do the assessment that is not a particular institution or people marking their own homework. It may be within the industry—it may be one of the industrial partnerships or something that the commission has a role in, but it is nevertheless a collective body that has an interest in not allowing its standards to decline.

I simply point you to the history of the great professions in this country. The standards of barristers, solicitors, accountants and chartered surveyors and the like have not been maintained because Ministers and civil servants were endlessly insisting that the standards be maintained; they have been maintained because the entire profession decided that it had a corporate interest in ensuring that those standards remained high and in punishing anyone who fell short. That is what we need to do.

I think Mr Esterson’s point was slightly different. It was about how we ensure that that also works for small businesses.

Q429 Bill Esterson: It is a combination, is it not? It is interesting that you mention the professions, because we have had problems with the standards in the accounting profession and law over the years. A regulatory role is needed to ensure that that sort of thing does not happen. Surely the point is about employer engagement, rather than just employer leadership. There is a balance. You used the word “partnership” in your last answer. Surely it is about partnership between the employer and the provider to ensure that outcomes are properly delivered and measured.

Nick Boles: I entirely agree with that. All I am saying, I think, is that I will not sign off a trailblazer standard for use out there and for Government funding unless it has an assessment that has been signed off by the panel that advises me as being rigorous and independent. That assessment has to check whether the apprentice has got from their apprenticeship what the taxpayer has a right to expect for their money. That will partly involve asking employers what they would expect. Obviously providers will have an important role, too, but if we just left it up to providers to assess themselves—not that I think anyone is suggesting that—we would be much more likely to get people making it a bit easy for themselves.

Q430 Mr Ward: Who is on the panel that you keep referring to?

Nick Boles: Right. Again, I will get the precise information, because I get submissions that tell me what the panel has told me, and I once knew who was on it, but I don’t know off the top of my head. I will give that information to you.

Q431 Chair: There is one panel, is there?

Nick Boles: Yes. It is a panel that checks the trailblazer standards and advises whether they are capable of going forward.

Q432 Mr Ward: So when the trailblazers have blazed the trail and it is all in place, who then is in charge of it? Who do the standards belong to? Who dates them? Who monitors them? There will be changing standards as time goes on. Who is responsible for all of that once the trailblazers have gone?

Nick Boles: That is a very good question, because of course you brought together a group of employers to help to create a standard, and you obviously hope that they will feel invested and that if they continue to be active in that industry that they will continue to have a role in it. But you cannot presume that. It may be with some people that the management changes or the business focus will change, and that they will slip away. That is why we in Government will always have a pretty active role, ensuring that every trailblazer, as it were, has a sort of owner—not an individual company owner, but a group in the industry that will take responsibility for it.

The solution will vary. Obviously, at the moment in the construction industry, there is a training board, so that is, in a sense, in its own particular pot. We have created and helped fund the start-up, and I am a big supporter of the industrial partnerships, which have been created under the auspices of the commission. We have a superb industrial partnership in the digital area; we have a very good one in the utilities and energy area. I am absolutely confident that those partnerships will play a vital role in ensuring that the trailblazers in their industries are maintained, that the assessment processes are robust and that they winnow out poor practice.

However, it is absolutely right that there may well be some industries where, as it were, the collective organisation is not quite so clearly defined, perhaps does not last and maybe some people will fall away. Then, we have a responsibility as a Government either to reform that or to check ourselves that those standards are maintained and updated. So there will never not be a role for Government.

All I would say is that, frankly, under the old system, which is the current system of the customer service apprenticeship that the Chairman opened with, there was such a blizzard of standards that there was nobody really doing this. The standard was there; so long as we continued to fund it, the standard was still a standard. And then every now and again we would switch off a few standards that we didn't think were working. It's much better to try to have a continuing sort of steward of a standard in the industry.

Q433 Mr Ward: You began by saying that you hoped that there would be continuation of the organisations. We talked about Germany earlier, and the Germans would not “hope”; they would have a system in place to ensure, rather than just hope. You were also talking about the professional bodies as a comparison, but of course they all pay subscriptions to ensure that there is a continued professional standard and monitoring of practice. Those bodies are actually funded by the professions themselves. Where is the mechanism? You mentioned earlier that this is being led by a volunteer, who is going round. This is a bit amateurish.

Nick Boles: No, I don't accept that at all. The volunteer, David Meller, is the apprenticeship ambassador. He is not involved in the standards at all. He is trying to persuade people. It is not just him but his huge network of ambassadors, all around the country, including within Parliament. They are going around persuading employers to get involved in the apprenticeship programme. We should be very grateful to them and not in any sense dismiss them as being amateurs.

In terms of maintaining quality control over standards, that needs to be done in a more consistent and established way. However, we should be very wary of somehow thinking that if we had—as has previously been the model, perhaps—some state-sponsored sector skills councils in every single area funded by a levy that somehow we would have a perfect outcome. We do have that model in construction, and I think the current chairman, who is doing a terrific job of trying to turn the organisation round, would be the first to admit that it has not succeeded in ensuring that we get a constant supply of high-quality, modern construction skills into the industry, even though there is a levy, a body and all the official imprimaturs you like. We need to be flexible: there will be different solutions in different industries, and it would be a huge error to think that we should impose one solution on all

industries. What we must insist on, though, is that there is a solution in each industry, but it may be different—it may be a training board or it may be an industrial partnership.

Q434 Mr Ward: But the answer to the question of who will bring forward new standards once the trailblazers have finished their work is, “We’re not sure.”

Nick Boles: No, it isn’t that we are not sure. The standards are owned by the Government. People can develop what standards they want, but if they want our money—the taxpayer’s money—they have to have them approved by us. So we own the standards, and we will have the continuing responsibility to ensure that they are maintained, that new ones are developed and that existing ones are adapted, but we think that the best way of doing that will vary by industry. As I say, there are some industries where we have been involved in helping to create individual partnerships, and those are tremendously well placed to do these things. There will be others where there are training boards, and there will be others where there is nothing quite like that, and we will therefore have to take a more active role.

If I could just answer the question I was not able to answer earlier, I am not going to be able to give you names, because it is not really about the representatives of organisations, but I will write to the Committee with the full detail on the panel. We have representatives of the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses, various providers, qualification-awarding bodies and, I believe, the TUC. It is, as it were, the whole piece who are on this panel, but I will write to the Committee with the full details. They are just advising me.

Q435 Mr Ward: But whoever is on that panel, it is time- limited—it will cease to exist.

Nick Boles: No, not at all. When we have completely finished the process of creating trailblazer standards and have switched off all the old frameworks, I suspect we will have to go back to the beginning, because, probably, the first trailblazer standard will be three years old. Whether it is this particular panel, there will always be an institution advising Ministers on whether a standard is still up to snuff and whether the assessment process is still working.

Q436 Chair: Thank you. Could you write to us about that? You said you did not want to have too fixed an approach and that there are different answers in different areas, but this Committee’s job is to scrutinise Government to make sure the ball doesn’t get dropped. Could you write to us setting out what this will look like, when we might expect it to happen and whether any machinery is being built in the background that will challenge particular sectors and say, “How do you want to do this?” You may not have prescribed all the detail, but we would like some idea so that, in nine months’ time, for instance, we would know that something should have been done.

Nick Boles: I am very happy to do that.

Q437 Pat Glass: Minister, we have your response, which is incredibly timely—it was published yesterday, before your appearance here today.

Nick Boles: I have been trying to get it published for quite a while.

Q438 Chair: Did today help?

Nick Boles: It did help.

Q439 Pat Glass: We have seen little or no evidence from anyone—the providers, the employers and so on—of support for the implementation of the funding reform. Is what we see now a pause, or is this issue being kicked well into the long grass?

Nick Boles: First, your premise is quite wrong, because I personally spoke to the TUC, the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Engineering Employers Federation and the chambers of commerce, and they all confirmed that they were all—including the TUC, I might add—committed to the principle of employer funding.

Q440 Pat Glass: The principle? No, I was saying that there was no support for the implementation.

Nick Boles: Needless to say, that is one of the reasons why we are not pursuing either of the two models. But it is absolutely not the long grass. You, I suspect, will be as aware as anybody sitting around this U-shaped table that we are running into the buffers somewhat of the election, purdah and Prorogation. It is definitely not the long grass. My personal ambition is to make it as short grass as possible, but I make no promises about whether we will be able to meet the Chairman's request of getting a solution announced by 8 May, because, of course, it is not 8 May; it is 30 March. So I cannot make any promises on that, but I am pushing as hard and fast as I can to come up with a solution, not least because I am absolutely confident that a solution is there, which will actually meet everybody's concerns.

Q441 Pat Glass: As we are talking about the solution, and you said that giving employers direct control of apprenticeships is non-negotiable, but you also want to remove the administrative burden and regulatory burden particularly from small businesses, and I have asked you to take into account the supply of quality providers, can you tell us where your thinking is at the moment? Is it just at the principle level, or can you go beyond that into any kind of detail?

Nick Boles: I am afraid I can't, because—you know, the incredibly annoying rules of clearance and write round. I actually have to get the agreement of Government colleagues to ideas. It is very depressing. So I cannot go into that, but what I can tell you is, firstly, I think it is very important to understand what the principle is. It is that the employer controls the purchasing power—so the Government's money that is going towards training: the employer controls that. That is the principle that I am confident that we can implement without burdening the employer with the administrative, regulatory burden.

Q442 Pat Glass: That, in a sense, Minister, was where we found witnesses really had a problem. They understood—they did not necessarily support, but there was some support for the principle; but when it came to the implementation they could not see a way in which this could be practically implemented without driving people out of the market.

Nick Boles: Well, I hope that I am going to be able to stun them all with a solution that is so simple and straightforward and yet does fulfil both those things, but I am afraid I cannot go into more detail right now.

Q443 Chair: Do you have that cunning plan, albeit you are not able to share it with us?

Nick Boles: Well no, absolutely—

Chair: So we should be optimistic.

Nick Boles: I hope I do, but you will understand if we do a lot more homework. Bluntly, we do not want to go off half-cock again, because frankly it has not been ideal to come forward with two proposals and then decide not to go ahead with either of them. I actually think it is good that Government listens and changes their mind, but it would have been better if we could have come forward with three proposals, one of which everybody liked. So I do not want to go off half-cock again; so speed is great, but it is more important to get it right.

Q444 Siobhain McDonagh: Given that the new apprenticeship standards are in their infancy, is there time to test the impact of the new funding model properly before it is implemented?

Nick Boles: Yes. As you will be aware, we have got a trailblazer pilot, which is testing part of the principle of the funding, in the sense that it is testing the idea of the employers making a one third contribution to the cost of training, and the Government making a two thirds contribution; and it has got various incentives around the age of the apprentice, the size of the firm and the completion of the apprenticeship and the successful completion by the apprentice of the scheme. So we are able to test some things, and that pilot has been operating this year and will operate in '15-16.

I think what we will see, assuming we come up with our model relatively swiftly, is it will not be so much a case of pilots—more a case of being phased in as the new standards come through. We never intended for there to be, as I say, the sort of dramatic moment where everybody jumps from one to the other. The idea was that we would move, over the course—I think it was to 2017-18—to a point where we were in the new system. I think it is going to be that kind of a movement. If it goes to 2018-19 it is not, certainly, something that will cause me to fall out of bed. What matters is that we do not interrupt, as the Chairman expressed concerns about, the current provision, but nevertheless bring in this new system alongside, and then over time everybody can migrate to the new system. So I think over the next three or

four years we would hope to see the new funding model and the new trailblazer standards replace the existing funding model and existing frameworks.

Q445 Mr Ward: I have some questions on value for money, but it is also linked to the new funding arrangements. There seems to be a general consensus that investment in apprenticeships is money well spent, and we have various figures here on what that return is, pound for pound. You have sold the new model on the basis of the power provided to employers to choose where they go for service. What about the issue of value for money? Do the new funding arrangements actually contribute in any way, in your view, to value for money?

Nick Boles: Yes, I think they do, for two reasons. One is that I hope we will get more value out of every apprenticeship because they will have some minimum standards, in terms of 12 months' duration and the like, and more importantly because the content will have been designed by a group of employers currently active and successful in their industry, so the programme itself should create skills of higher relevance and market value.

Also, as I said, one of the other key ambitions of the reform is to secure a contribution to the cost of training from employers. Frankly, we must accept that although that is the declared intention, it does not actually happen in a lot of cases at the moment. In principle, it should be one-third employer and two-thirds Government, but actually the training provider provides the training at a price almost exactly the amount of the Government's contribution. We want to move to a point where we are securing a greater financial contribution from employers, but as I said at the start, I am nervous about how we will do that at the same time as trying to encourage in new employers. I am very keen to see if we can explore a way of ramping up the financial contribution from employers, rather than imposing it right at the start.

Q446 Chair: You get to the nub of it there. You say that if you had to pick one challenge, it would be getting more employers to offer apprenticeships. Then you say, "What we really want to do is make employers pay more." If you make people pay more, you sell less.

Nick Boles: I think it is possible to reconcile those, but you are right that there is a tension, which is why we are doing more work to make sure that we can make it particularly attractive to new employers who have never done apprenticeships before.

Q447 Chair: But that is just putting it on new employers. You may have not met them, but I have met plenty of people who have had an apprentice that didn't work out, and who do not want to do it again. Incentives are not just to get someone in for the first time, but general. That is why only 9% of people provide apprenticeships.

The Gatsby Foundation numbers show that 70,000 technicians a year are retiring at the moment. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are coming up that are absolutely critical to the national economy and rebuilding infrastructure, and all of them offer phenomenal

opportunities to young people for decent long-term careers and great earnings, but we are not producing them. Here we are, and the danger is that while you are wrestling with the tensions, we are moving in the direction of making it more expensive for employers when our central problem is that left to their own devices, they don't do it, and even when training providers pay most of the costs, they don't do it.

If you were looking at it fundamentally, and you started from first principles—I always say, “What is the biggest problem here?” We will touch on careers. If you misdiagnose what the biggest problem with careers and schools is, you will get the wrong solution. If you misdiagnose or get confused about all the issues in this world, you will get it wrong. The biggest issue is that not enough employers offer apprenticeships. Therefore, to keep it crude and simple, you have to create more incentives for them to do it. Making it more expensive doesn't obviously fulfil that, whatever the tensions and your careful words about new people.

If you were going to be really radical, why wouldn't you say we are unusual? Only Australia spends money for people over 25 to do training. Why don't we fit in with early intervention principles—do it early, do it right—and concentrate all the money on 16 to 19-year-olds to get them all set, and pay employers whatever it takes to get them to commit to proper training that leads to level 3 higher-level skills, which would be good for them and good for the country in the long term? Stop spending money on 26-year-old shop assistants who are already employed by Asda.

Nick Boles: Well, Mr Chairman, that is a very bold prospectus, and a good pitch for my job, or rather my boss's job, which you would do very well. The news isn't as gloomy as you think. The fact is that the UKCES, which has no axe to grind—it certainly is not in the business of saving my bacon—is saying that 14% of employers are providing apprenticeships, not 9% or 10%. That is a substantial improvement. The number of workplaces—workplaces are not the same thing as employers, because you can have multiple workplaces in one employer—with apprenticeships has gone up from 220,000 to 240,000. We are achieving growth, which is coming not because of the brilliance of our marketing campaign or even because of the wonderful efforts of David Meller and his network, although they are essential and fantastic—

Alex Cunningham: 14% is not—

Nick Boles: I will finish my sentence if I may, Mr Cunningham.

That is a 10% increase in the number of workplaces and a near 50% increase in the percentage of employers providing apprenticeships. I don't consider that to be a bad record. People are doing it not because of the blandishments of the Government, but because they perceive a value in it.

One of the reasons for wanting to require employers to make a contribution—not a majority contribution, but a contribution—which, in truth, has always been the claim of Government policy, is to ensure that they are thinking about it as an investment in their future and their workforce. If a training provider simply pops up and says, “Listen, I can put this person on an apprenticeship. You won't notice anything, you don't have to deal with anything and you'll get a bit of Government money to give them a bit of training on the side,”

frankly, that is not what any of us would consider to be a worthwhile apprenticeship. If they are actually making an investment in it—

Q448 Chair: No one is against the principle. The central problem is supply, and what we try to do on this Committee—doubtless, we don’t always get it right—is obsess about the incentives of the system. We, as national politicians, set a framework that drives the behaviour within, and we have to work out what the real driver of behaviour is, not what we think it is or what we are told by representatives that it is. That is what we try to do. Crudely, if you want more apprenticeships, how on earth does agonising about your theoretical and philosophical desire for a greater contribution from employers fit with the chronic failure, notwithstanding the fact that the Government are doing slightly better than the woeful prior performance—congratulations—to meet the skills needs of the nation or the duty we owe to young people to provide them with what they need to have prosperous careers?

Nick Boles: First, I don’t accept that; 9% to 14% is not a derisory improvement, but a very substantial improvement. Having 2 million apprenticeships in a Parliament when we have made them much more demanding and increased them to 12 months is not a derisory achievement. The number of full apprenticeships of 12 months or more increased by more than 250,000 between 2009-10 and 2013-14. That is not a derisory achievement.

I don’t buy the suggestion that we are going to be able to persuade an employer who has not done apprenticeships before to start doing them and to ask them for a cheque. I just don’t buy that. That is my main point. But—I’ll just come back, because you challenged the direction of the reform—what I do buy is that once you’ve done it for a year, you should be seeing sufficient value from it to pay for a third of the cost of the training. If you don’t, there’s probably something wrong with the trailblazer standard or the whole scheme. They provide benefit to employers, as all employers who do them attest. They don’t just provide public good. It is reasonable to say that over time—this is why I use the phrase “ramp up”—we will get to a point at which we will ask people to contribute 30% of the cost. I agree that it would be risky to ask for that up front.

Q449 Alex Cunningham: I don’t have a problem with acknowledging the increase in the number of apprenticeships, but I am concerned about the quality, which you touched on. Would you welcome a contract requirement inference in Government and multi-Government contracts to employ apprentices and provide work experience opportunities?

Nick Boles: No, I don’t, because I don’t think it would work.

Q450 Alex Cunningham: Why would it not work?

Nick Boles: Because if we put further regulatory burdens on firms, and if people do it reluctantly, they will do it in the way that they did with work experience, which was required by the previous Government. You ended up with something that wasn’t in any way work experience, and was entirely demotivating. The high-quality work experience has to be done because the employer sees a benefit, whether because of their own sense of social

responsibility or because they actually want to make contact with good young people who might one day come to them.

Q451 Alex Cunningham: You get a £10 million contract from Government. You are a huge organisation and do not provide any apprenticeships. Shouldn't we be putting the finger on them?

Nick Boles: Sorry, I thought you were saying that this would be a blanket requirement on all firms. Whereas, what I think you are suggesting now is suppliers to Government.

Q452 Alex Cunningham: Most contracts are very large. If you are bidding for contracts from Government they are large.

Nick Boles: We have a nervousness about applying this to all Government procurement, because there has been a history of loading so many social objectives on to procurement processes that one has lost sight of the core, for the taxpayer, at a time of extraordinarily high budget deficit, which is value for money. One area where I do agree with you, and so do Lord Deighton, the Minister for infrastructure, and everybody in the Government, is that we much look much more closely at this with respect to major infrastructure projects.

The reason is simple. The thing that is threatening the future delivery of major infrastructure projects on budget is the cost. Government is going to be the customer on those projects in five, 10, 15 or 20 years' time, so we have a direct cost interest in ensuring that the engineering and construction industries meet their skills needs. So we have agreed in Government that we will look to place a requirement in all procurement and major infrastructure projects for an investment in skills generally and particularly in apprenticeships.

There are two examples we want to learn from. Crossrail has had a very successful approach that is on track to create 400 apprenticeships. HS2 is going to do the same. I had a very good meeting with the chairman of HS2 last week to discuss that. Lord Deighton and I are working up how we can do that so that it does not undermine the search for value for money but actually supports it by ensuring that we create a steady supply of construction, tunnelling and engineering skills.

In major infrastructures where we want to start—at the moment we don't think it is right for all Government procurement—it is a reasonable requirement for anyone who is building us a road, railway or airport.

Q453 Alex Cunningham: I have to say that in my four years on the Committee, that is the best answer I have heard from a Minister, because you actually listened to what I said. There are things happening and I do appreciate that.

Nick Boles: Thank you.

Q454 Alex Cunningham: On careers advice, the current Government have ditched the funding for careers in schools. They put responsibility on schools and did not give them any resources to do that. It is clear from the evidence received by this inquiry, from Ofsted reports and even the Secretary of State herself, that careers guidance in schools is generally inadequate. How do we put it right?

Nick Boles: You have been so kind to me, Mr Cunningham—

Q455 Alex Cunningham: I was just warming you up.

Nick Boles: —that I am reluctant to challenge the premise. I do not accept that we have withdrawn all the funding for careers. We have protected the schools budget at a time when most other budgets in Government have been cut.

Q456 Alex Cunningham: But not the careers budget. It was ditched.

Nick Boles: We have made clear that within the protected schools budget it is the responsibility of the governing body and the head to decide how much to spend on careers. I find that if you go to a really good school, whether an academy or maintained school or of any kind, they do make a proper investment and tend to have a careers co-ordinator who is involved in pulling in employers and all of the programmes.

Alex Cunningham: But the Ofsted report, albeit a year old, showed that only one in five schools is providing good or even adequate careers advice. That is bound to damage the prospects of young people who might be promoted towards the idea of apprenticeships.

Q457 Chair: Sorry, Alex. If we go into a debate about the pluses and minuses of careers advice in general we may not get anywhere. The Secretary of State accepted the Ofsted evidence that 80% is not good enough. That will do for that argument. Could we ask you specifically, with Alex's permission, what can be done to encourage schools to do a better job? How do we change the incentives? Because they are not doing it right now; that is what the Secretary of State told us.

Nick Boles: First, I accept the analysis. That is why we changed the requirement. There is a requirement on schools to provide independent advice and guidance to young people in order to make their choices. Although I would never want to interfere with the way that Ofsted does its job, I very much hope that we will see situations arise where a school, which is otherwise good or outstanding in its academic performance, its teaching quality and all the other things that schools quite properly focus on, is marked down a grade because it completely fails to provide independent advice and guidance or to give the local FE college or apprenticeship provider an opportunity to come in and talk about what they do. It would be a very healthy step if we saw a few schools actually suffering for that.

Q458 Chair: Interestingly, that is a step which your boss refused to make last week. I should just say that, out of amusement.

Nick Boles: That is a judgment for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. I am simply saying that if it happened, I would welcome it.

Alex Cunningham: I was just about to say that you had stunned me with a second good answer.

Chair: That is the best answer I have heard from a Minister.

Nick Boles: I am obviously getting myself into terrible trouble here.

Q459 Alex Cunningham: Ofsted are hardly ever in schools. How do we make sure that we are judging and assessing our schools properly on this? If they are only in very occasionally—maybe every four or five years—how do we make sure that the terrible situation we are in now can be improved?

Nick Boles: Ultimately—I rather share this feeling—the Committee must be bored to tears of hearing the phrase “destination data”.

Q460 Alex Cunningham: We like the phrase very much.

Nick Boles: We all love the phrase; we would just like to see the reality, and the reality is proving rather harder to achieve. It is still on track but, as you know, there are some specific clauses in the small business Bill that are going to unlock it. We have some very crude first-level destination data which now have to appear in the school's performance information, saying what percentage go into either an education programme or employment. That needs to become much more granular and, in time, I think that it will be the chief method.

What will be very quickly apparent is that you may be sending 20% of your young people to Russell Group universities—yippee, isn't that great?—but if another 20% are not going into education, training or employment of any kind, that should come and bite you. Ultimately, destination data will provide that pressure far better than Ofsted inspectors or Government regulations. We did not introduce that requirement just to satisfy you; we introduced it because we believe it. Schools should be doing this and the performance management regime should take that into account and bite on them if they don't.

Q461 Alex Cunningham: There is no doubt that they are a long way off yet. We have seen the demise of the education business partnerships—I know that they exist in the odd place here and there across the country—which sorted out work experience and things of that nature. Do you see a situation where that could be brought back—mandatory work experience to start with and then a proper system where young people get proper work experience, not just a placement with their mate's dad?

Nick Boles: I am lucky enough to have such a partnership—a brilliant one—still thriving and which, interestingly, has got very involved as a delivery organisation of the National Citizen Service in Lincolnshire and Rutland. I am lucky, and I think that the good ones have been very good. I suspect that, despite our apparent love-in, we are approaching a moment of ideological difference.

Alex Cunningham: We got over-confident.

Nick Boles: I do not believe that mandation works. There was too much mandation on schools under the previous regime, which distracted them from their core task. The truth is that good schools will do the right things because they are genuinely trying to improve the lives of all the young people in their care. You find that some of the best, top-performing academy chains nevertheless make a very substantial investment in careers advice and guidance and in giving people a sense of opportunities because they believe that that is their mission in life and what they are there to do.

Q462 Alex Cunningham: Do you personally believe that young people should have the opportunity of a week's work experience here and there?

Nick Boles: Absolutely, but mandating it to schools did not work, bluntly, when it was done by the last Government. I do not believe that it would work if we did it. What matters is that everyone understands that it is a tremendously good thing to do. We need to encourage more employers to think of doing it. It is not going to be schools that are best placed to encourage employers to do it.

Q463 Alex Cunningham: But we need an organisation that can actually identify good-quality placements for the children who are not mandated.

Nick Boles: I think you heard about this last week from the Secretary of State, but this is exactly the idea of enterprise advisers, which will be the new careers company's No. 1 priority. Every school should be working with its local economic partnership, and should identify a current or recently retired executive to be the enterprise adviser for that school who is the conduit for all of this stuff—the person who visits every local employer and asks them, "What are you going to do for work experience for my school?" The adviser should bring people to speak in the school, and create opportunities for young people. That is the right way to do it. It is not mandation but we are expecting enterprise advisers to be in all schools once the careers company has had a few years to get going.

Q464 Chair: Do you have any sympathy with the idea that all 14-year-olds or a subset of young people from age 14 onwards should have an integrated preparation for work programme running in parallel and integrated with their academic education, and that we are just failing to prepare people for the workplace? Do you think that until we try to put it together in a co-ordinated way—the involvement of employers and all the rest of it—there is no framework to hang the various things on and add up to a programme that prepares the

majority of the population for the destination of the majority of the population, which is not university?

Nick Boles: I have never taught in a school. I went to school, like most of us, but I have wiped most of that from my memory so I would be nervous about suggesting that a particular approach is right or better, let alone that it should be mandated. However, on the objective of what you are saying—absolutely. I do not think that it happens in enough schools at the moment; I agree.

Q465 Pat Glass: May I ask you about the current foundation review of maths and English? There are sound reasons why apprenticeships are in BIS and not necessarily in the DfE, one of those being that you need different—not fewer— skills. Witnesses to this inquiry have told us that the new GCSE in English and maths is not appropriate for young people following apprenticeships. Having seen the new GCSE in English in some detail, where there has been, in my view, a major shift of the balance from receptive and expressive language to literature with a heavy emphasis on Shakespeare, I can understand people saying, “Why can’t the trailblazers be allowed to design functional maths and English for a technical apprenticeship?”

Nick Boles: I think that we are right to insist that any young person who has a possibility of acquiring a C grade in English and maths GCSE should be given every opportunity to do so, because it is a reality that that is the standard that employers understand, value and respect. We would be criminally negligent if we somehow told a young person that that was not the standard to which they should aspire. I have no doubt about the rightness of our insistence that if people have not achieved that standard at school but have only missed it by one grade—they get a D—they should be put back into the programme at further education college or wherever they go next and have another crack at it.

I have been keen to ensure that the expectations and provision for those who are not in that category—those who got less than D grades in GCSE English and maths— commands the respect of employers and is understood. I will be completely honest with you, as I have been so far about saying that I am not a teacher and do not have a background in the education world: I had never heard of functional skills qualifications before I got this job. I sort of feel that if it was a qualification that had a currency value, I probably would have heard of it and should have done.

The test that I have set the Education and Training Foundation, which I have asked to look at functional skills qualifications and the whole question of what kind of skills training should be provided to young people who will not do the GCSE after their first attempt, is that I want something where people come home and say, “Mum, mum, I got this,” because I bet nobody has ever said, “Mum, mum, I got my functional skills qualification.”

Q466 Pat Glass: I know somebody who said that to me recently.

Nick Boles: I am delighted.

Pat Glass: And she was delighted.

Nick Boles: But it is not something that you could tell many employers and they would immediately say, “This is great”, and it should be. It can be demanding and consistent, but different from a GCSE. That is not, in any way, undermining the value of GCSEs. Anybody who can do GCSEs should do them, but we need to ensure that what you do if you cannot do the GCSE to C grade is understood, respected and valued.

Q467 Pat Glass: In a sense, what I am asking you about is the appropriateness of it. I tend to think that the current, or proposed, GCSE in English appears to have been designed by the former Secretary of State. Is it appropriate if you are an apprentice in digital engineering, etc.? I don’t know much about functional skills, but I have been persuaded by a wide range of people that apprenticeships are a very demanding course—different, but demanding. If it is more appropriate, shouldn’t we be looking at how we raise the profile, rather than saying that people have to do a course in Shakespeare, even though they might be a plumber or a plasterer? I have tried to teach maths to plasterers and, believe me, it is hard enough. You have to make it appropriate. Isn’t there an argument for looking at functional skills and raising their profile, rather than forcing kids through a qualification that is not appropriate and that they will fail?

Nick Boles: I don’t think it is a choice. I absolutely agree with the first part of what you are saying: we need to look at functional skills and raise their profile, which we do by ensuring that the standard is more consistent, more respected and better understood. That is what we are working on. I don’t believe we should be telling anyone with a realistic chance of getting a C at GCSE on the second attempt that they shouldn’t do it.

Pat Glass: So give them the opportunity by raising the profile.

Chair: We need to move on.

Q468 Mr Raab: I have two questions on the lingering cultural sniffiness in this country about the vocational route versus the academic route. Both questions are about the Government’s role. First, what is the Government doing to ensure that schools are measured against all destination outcomes, rather than just university places?

Nick Boles: I referred to it earlier, and at the moment we have slightly crude destination data about who goes into employment and who goes into a full-time course, and the data need to become more granular. I would like to see us report on how many young people go into apprenticeships. I gave you some interesting aggregate figures, which should be granular, too: in three to five years after leaving school, what are the earnings and employment rates of particular programmes and institutions?

Q469 Mr Raab: Sorry, I know you mentioned it earlier, but my question was not only about providing the data. Should there be a formal benchmark measurement that encourages people to look at and judge schools, rather than just delving into the data themselves? Should it be part of the league tables or some other benchmark?

Nick Boles: I don't want to rush into saying something about which I am not quite sure of the implications. I would be keen for it to be very immediately apparent how many people from a school get to go and do an apprenticeship that completes—I am particularly obsessed with apprenticeships. I would be very keen to do that. I don't want to be in the business of writing new benchmarks when I don't quite know what that involves. I think it should be transparent, partly because if you make the information transparent, whether or not the Government calls it a benchmark, people will judge it.

Chair: One more quick question.

Q470 Mr Raab: We have heard from witnesses who have suggested that raising the school leaving age encourages schools to keep pupils on the academic route when they might be better off heading down the vocational route earlier. What do you say to that? In particular, we have heard quite a lot of very consistent evidence on the value of the last Government's young apprenticeship scheme, which was phased out under this Government. Do you have any enduring objections to looking again at that kind of model?

Nick Boles: I certainly think that apprenticeships, which are jobs let's not forget, are absolutely appropriate for many 16 to 18-year-olds, but there is no conflict between that and the participation age because, as you know, an apprenticeship counts as fulfilling the participation age. I begin to have some hesitancy when people are going out earlier than 16. One of the problems with the young apprenticeship programme, even though it might have had some merit as an experience, was that it was part of what was leading to a dilution and undermining of the apprenticeship brand. An apprenticeship is a job. If it isn't a job, it is not an apprenticeship. You cannot have a job if you are 14, and therefore you cannot do an apprenticeship. Can you do something that involves an employer in a very active way and that involves work experience? Absolutely. Should there be programmes that make that available to people who are turned off by academic education but who may be lit up by experience? Absolutely, but I would be very nervous about doing it through apprenticeships.

Q471 Mr Raab: So your objection to young apprenticeships, which was about ensuring you had the core literacy and numeracy at GCSE levels but also some work-based training, is that it is not a job—

Nick Boles: So it is not an apprenticeship. This is very important. It is an absolutely simple—and essential—point. Every apprenticeship is a job. Every apprentice is an employee.

Q472 Mr Raab: So if we relabelled it—by the way, they were hugely successful. The real objection that we had was cost, so if we relabelled it, you wouldn't have a problem with it?

Nick Boles: I do not have a problem with the idea of a programme, at that age, that involves all of those elements.

Q473 Mr Raab: It is the title?

Nick Boles: My personal nervousness would be about calling anything that isn't a job an apprenticeship. I am sure that cost might well be another concern, but in terms of the content, I do not have a problem with it. Don't tell people it is an apprenticeship because you undermine the value of the apprenticeship brand.

Q474 Alex Cunningham: The performance of the traineeship scheme has been relatively modest. What are the Government doing to increase the number to a level that will make a real difference to much larger numbers of young people who are not yet ready for work?

Nick Boles: I love this, in a way. If we hadn't decided to take this new programme and be cautious about it to ensure that it was high quality and that good providers worked out how it was going to work then I am sure I would be being hauled up in front of the Committee for creating some total waste of money and the NAO would be all over it. I don't think it has been modest, but has it been cautious? Absolutely, and on purpose.

We now have 10,000 of them in the most recent year and we are looking to get that up to 14,000. What you are finding is that both providers and, indeed, employers are beginning to work out how they can make this work. We have intentionally made it quite flexible. It has got some core elements that have to be there, but we are not prescriptive about when the work experience happens or how long the training is—up to six months, but some of them are two months and some are longer. I think that is right, and I am pleased about that.

I think it is a successful programme, which is why we have now expanded the range of people who can do them, so that you can do them if you have a prior level, up to the age of 19. I am glad that it is not suddenly 50,000, because I suspect if it was, there would be a whole lot of rubbish leaking through.

Q475 Alex Cunningham: And I am delighted that a Government Minister is committed to the idea of good-quality piloting before expanding. Can I haul you instead, Minister, over the cost? What I understand is that for the cost of one person to go through this, if that money was being spent in Germany, it would provide them with a whole year of support. Is it value for money?

Nick Boles: I was not aware of the German figures and I would be very interested to see them if you are able to provide them. I think that it is value for money because it does something that we know from the figures is critical to having an impact on people's employability. That is mixing real experience in the workplace, which you have just been urging me to expand, with the securing of the formal skills that you need to be able to function in almost any environment. I do not believe, if you compare it to the cost of other FE courses and qualifications that do not have that mix, it is unreasonable. If, in Germany, they are able to do it cheaper—well, their houses are a lot cheaper too and I spent most of my last job trying to work out how we can make British houses as cheap as German houses, so I don't think we should necessarily measure ourselves in that way.

Q476 Chair: It is fair to say that it is embryonic as well and therefore the unit cost is bound to be higher than, hopefully, it would be if expanded.

Nick Boles: Sure.

Q477 Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for giving evidence to us today. One final point from me, if I may. There are four principles of future apprenticeships: apprenticeships should be a job, should be substantial in terms of training, should give full competency and should develop transferable skills. Those are the four key principles of future apprenticeships. Is it as obvious to you as it is to me as to what is missing from that?

Nick Boles: Sorry, it's a job, transferable skills—

Q478 Chair: It is a job; it should be substantial; it should give full competency; and it should provide transferable skills. What else would you expect? What is the deal we offer, in this context, to a young person for spending years on low pay learning a trade? What should they expect to get? What is the central thing that a young person should expect to get from an apprenticeship at the end?

Nick Boles: Hopefully, that they stay on in a job in the organisation or in another organisation of equal quality.

Q479 Chair: And what sort of job?

Nick Boles: A well-paid job.

Q480 Chair: Precisely. And if you do not put in the four principles of future apprenticeships the central fundamental of what you should be offering young people, who, after all, give up other opportunities—their friends will be earning lots of money, but they have to defer gratification, and the deal is that they get something at the end—one way that we would undermine apprenticeships is if we allow apprenticeships, whether they are in waiting, retail or somewhere else, or even engineering, if poorly constructed, as a result of which at the end of years of being paid very little and working very hard, you do not actually earn any more. If we do not embed the need for income transformation—ideally, if I can put this to you, we would find a metric that we can use and insert in our assessment systems, so that those frameworks or occupational standards that do not deliver on the deal for the young person, and effectively are a con, cease to get apprenticeship money and cease to carry Government imprimatur.

Nick Boles: I agree 100%, but do not talk down the existing scheme quite as much. Right now, those with an intermediate-level apprenticeship—this is level 3—including the customer service apprenticeships in the restaurant that you saw advertised on the site, earn between £48,000 and £74,000 more over their lifetime than similar individuals with a level 1

or level 2 qualification. Those with an advanced-level apprenticeship earn, on average, between £77,000 and £117,000 more. That is in the existing programme, with the existing standards, some of which we can all have our doubts about, but those averages are from the existing programme.

Everything that we are doing with the trailblazer reforms should be making it even more valuable to people. The measure I gave—the level 2 apprenticeships—have 11% higher earnings three to five years later, and level 3 apprenticeships 16% higher. I want to have that percentage figure on every apprenticeship standard eventually. That is why destination data is ultimately the answer to many of our questions. You are right that the first indicator that a trailblazer should have a bullet put through its brain is when that percentage starts slipping back to 1% or 2%, because then, frankly, it is not good enough.

Q481 Chair: So is there an opportunity to ensure that when people put down their sets of principles in the future, the income transformation requirement is in there, too? The only thing that I would also add—that was an excellent answer, and I should have let it rest, but I can't—is that you were responding to a different point. The point about the waiting apprenticeship is not that it might not be income-transformative—there are lots of short courses that are excellent and have a positive impact—but is it an apprenticeship because of the complexity and depth of training that is required? There are two distinct points there, and one should not conflate them if one is to keep clarity over apprenticeship policy.

Nick Boles: I entirely accept that. The principles that you laid out—are those written down on a tablet somewhere, or are they just yours?

Q482 Chair: No, no, these are the four principles of future apprenticeships.

Nick Boles: Whose are they? Are they mine?

Q483 Chair: This is the Government response.

Nick Boles: Fine. Well, let's agree that there are now five principles of high-quality apprenticeships, which include income transformation.

Q484 Chair: This is from your implementation plan.

Nick Boles: Right. Well, there are now five principles of high-quality apprenticeship.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much indeed for giving evidence to us today.

