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10.40 am

Witnesses: Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett and Mr Malcolm Trobe

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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Members present

Baroness Corston (Chairman)
 Baroness Berridge
 Baroness Blood
 Lord Farmer
 Lord Holmes of Richmond
 Baroness Howells of St Davids
 Earl of Kinnoull
 Baroness Morris of Yardley
 Lord Patel
 Baroness Sharp of Guildford
 Baroness Stedman-Scott
 Baroness Tyler of Enfield

Examination of Witnesses

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett, principal of Northampton College, Association of Colleges and **Mr Malcolm Trobe**, deputy general secretary, Association of School and College Leaders

Q87 The Chairman: Welcome to this 10th formal evidence session in the inquiry of the Select Committee on Social Mobility into the transition from schools to work. It is important to point out to our witnesses that this session is open to the public. A webcast of the session will go out live and subsequently will be accessible via the parliamentary website. A verbatim transcript will be taken of your evidence and it will also be put on the parliamentary website. A few days after this session you will receive a transcript of your evidence and we would ask you to check it for accuracy. We would be very grateful if any corrections are notified to us as quickly as possible. However, after this session if you wish to clarify or amplify any points you make today or submit any further evidence, you are welcome to submit it to us in writing. If you would like to introduce yourselves for the record and then we will begin the questions.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: I am Pat Brennan-Barrett and I am the principal of Northampton College.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: I am Malcolm Trobe. I am a former secondary school head teacher and now deputy general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders.

The Chairman: I think it is right to say that university technical colleges, studio schools and career colleges take students at age 14 until 18 or 19. In the last decade or so we have heard

a lot about 14 to 19 education. What are the benefits of creating that transition point at age 14, rather than what is seen as the traditional age of 18?

Mr Malcolm Trobe: One of the key issues here is that it gives a great opportunity to motivate young people. If they have specific ideas or areas of interest that they want to pursue, then it gives them the opportunity to go in that direction. Quite clearly, some youngsters will look for an academic direction but others may want to go down the technical or vocational, or what is now called the technical and professional, route, looking to develop those skills alongside their academic skills. It is a potential way of setting some youngsters off on their career pathway. Of course, education for youngsters does not cease at 16 now; it goes on until 18. We have been through several iterations of trying to achieve a coherent 14 to 18 or 14 to 19 programme and investigate what we want youngsters to look at when they finish their education programme at 18, rather than a specific focus in on 16. If you are moving youngsters to give them the opportunity to work with people who have that level of technical skill, whether it is part time in a college or through movement into a different institution, you are going to have more access to people with those skills.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: I would agree with what Malcolm is saying, but I would also say that that point is a critical time when a student is deciding what type of career they are going to have. Opening up technical education and professional pathways to them at that age is very beneficial. However—and you could see the “however” coming—this is the sort of work that further education colleges have done for many years. In my previous college, we had 500 students from age 14 who were on technical courses and achieved very well. One thing to take into account is that colleges could already do the work of UTCs.

The other thing to take into account is where there is a very good UTC brand—for example, in my own area it is Silverstone, which is high-tech sports cars and engineering—if you aspire to that type of career, that is obviously a choice you are going to make. Not many people at 14 know exactly what it is they want to do. I think the political vision and mission has had the unintended consequence, therefore, of some 14 year-olds, who are perhaps not doing so well at school, going to UTCs and not doing particularly well there perhaps because they are bringing the same issues they had at school into the UTCs. My view is that colleges could do this work. Not all UTCs have been thought through coherently. There is no diagnostic view of where they should be. Where there is a strong brand, they are working well; where there is not, they are not working well, and it is very confusing for parents.

The Chairman: Is this provision available nationally or is it patchy?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: UTCs are available nationally. Some areas might have three and others just one. The vision of the Government is to have a UTC in every city, but I would add some caution here because UTCs are being placed where there is a declining demographic of 14 year-olds. It is at a time when we are moving into austerity for colleges and also area reviews, which I know you are going to ask me about later, and it does not make sense to open a UTC with a small number of students—perhaps 200 or 300, aspiring to 600—when we have colleges that have the capacity to manage the technical qualifications and, equally, at a time when colleges are being asked to reduce their funding significantly. There seems to be a bit of a dichotomy there.

Q88 Baroness Morris of Yardley: Just picking up on something you have said, I am trying to think of the young people who will end up on these 14 to 19 courses who are not in mainstream schools. I am asking you because I think the answer might be different for colleges, for those who come to you at 14 and go through to 19 or whatever, and for those whom the UTCs are trying to recruit. What I want to draw out, considering both colleges and your feelings about UTCs, is exactly what group of people are they serving. You talked about the benefits of 14 to 19. I agree absolutely with Malcolm; I think that analysis was right, but if you are at public school and you are doing A-levels and you end up at Oxbridge, you do not have to find your way through any of this nightmare. It is very cohesive and coherent and it runs through: you do not change schools; you do not change values; you do not change teachers, and you go on. Could you comment on that as well, because I am trying to guess what your answer to the first question might be? If it is the young people who normally have not been successful at school, is there a risk that in this 14 to 19 new approach, a lot of change can knock them off course and be quite difficult for them to deal with, certainly compared with GCSE, A-level and university?

Mr Malcolm Trobe: There is a risk of too early specialisation and directing youngsters very specifically into a career path. That is an element of risk with UTCs, as Pat has already indicated. What we would be looking for is that youngsters would still be on a core programme which would provide a basic academic education. They need the opportunity to move between pathways, so what we are looking at is not a single straight pathway but pathways which youngsters can cross over.

You mentioned Oxbridge and A-levels, but we do see a higher proportion of people going to university now with alternative qualifications to A-levels. The programmes need to meet the needs of the individual students without cutting off career opportunities. This highlights something that I think you will probably be pulling out later, which is careers advice and the level of support that you are able to give youngsters, because youngsters switching off, youngsters who are having difficulties with their studies and who may become disengaged, occurs before 14. It is very important that engagement comes right through primary and right into the secondary school sector, so that we are motivating students and they can see routes forward.

One of the big difficulties for youngsters, particularly in highly disadvantaged areas, is what they see as the employment prospects. You may not tell it from my accent, but I am a Geordie, and I come from a village called Ashington, which now has something in the region of 30% youth unemployment and generational unemployment going through. One of the key things is to give youngsters hope for their future, so they have to see employment prospects at the end of potential career routes.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Can you say a little about the demographics of this group you are dealing with? Are they mainly boys, mainly working class?

Mr Malcolm Trobe: White working-class boys are undoubtedly the biggest group. I live and work in Leicester now, which has a very large ethnic population, and you can see very clearly the difference between the white working-class areas and the aspirations the parents have for their children, and which the youngsters therefore pick up themselves, and the aspirations in the Asian population.

Baroness Sharp of Guildford: I was going to ask a slightly different question which is an extension of the first question. There are some people who feel we should, in any case, shift the curriculum towards 14 to 19 as a whole, and given that we have raised the participation age we should be looking at 14 to 19 as a block of education and giving people, as you rightly say, very flexible opportunities within that block. What is your feeling about this?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Two points. Firstly, it is a really good aspiration, but it is not a natural aspiration. I will answer the first one first, and I am going to give the example of Northamptonshire. In Northamptonshire we have very low levels of GCSE attainment, the sort of levels we saw in London 20 years ago. We are struggling with that. I have just had 3,000 youngsters come into the college without a GCSE in English and maths, so there are

the logistics but also trying to work out how to move them through to level 3 and 4, which is A-level and BTEC level, and beyond.

I have worked with a group of schools, both primary and secondary schools, and I was very surprised to see how interested they were in ensuring that their students had the opportunity to decide the things they wanted to do, not just at age 14 but before that. Even the primary schools were saying that some of the children already know what they want to do—they want to be an engineer or they want to be a nurse—so I think that would work really well. We developed what we called “cradle to career” and it worked really well. We achieved a big intake. The difficulty is if we do not have a national, thought-out, coherent method of moving a student from 14, we will dilute the current education offer, because if you take students out of a school at 14, you are taking £4,400 out with that student and they still have to offer the same amount of support within the school, so that means there could be the redundancy of a teacher or whatever. The view is excellent; it is whether we could do that coherently and diagnostically.

The Chairman: Did you want to add anything to Baroness Morris’s question?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: I was going to say to Baroness Morris that the groups not represented within the UTCs at 14 are particularly boys, and also black and Asian minority groups or students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: It is still very early days for UTCs and we have already seen two UTCs close—the one in Hackney and the one in the Black Country—because of under-recruitment and in one case falling into an Ofsted category. Early indications are that the recruitment of young women is proportionately significantly lower. Even in one of the most successful UTCs, which is JCB, the number of girls in the college is extremely low. There are significant issues related to that.

Q89 Baroness Berridge: Does high-quality and meaningful work experience happen post 16? Is it monitored and what are the challenges to delivering that?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: As a country we have initiated a new programme for 16 to 18 year-olds called the study programme, which came to fruition in 2013. The study programme is the framework of an education from the age of 16. It includes the main qualification; English and maths if you do not already have an A to C in English and maths; work experience and then tutorials. Within that framework you must have a student in college for 540 hours a year as a minimum, and work experience is part of that. The whole of the curriculum is

geared towards employability because you have English and maths and the main qualification. Nursing, for example, could be a health and social care BTEC qualification perhaps at level 2, or it could be a level 3 or even level 1. Then you have the work experience that has to be related to the aspiration of the young person, i.e. their destination. If that young person wants to be a nurse, you would be looking to place them within some care setting. The challenge is trying to place, in my case, 3,500 youngsters, along with the other two colleges in the county, making 10,000 youngsters, into appropriate work experience. Nevertheless, I think we are doing a reasonable job on that because further education colleges always look to develop employability skills. The logistics are a challenge, but it is a challenge that we can definitely meet.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: The position in schools is slightly different, where the programme is predominantly A-level, and the amount of work experience, or work shadowing, which people are able to deliver is very variable. In other words, in some institutions you are seeing a fair amount of this, but in other institutions the principal focus is on the A-level programmes and you are not seeing a significant amount of work experience.

There are difficulties, as Pat has indicated, one of which is that for some highly skilled jobs it is very difficult to get work experience because the skill which is required even to go in, or the confidentiality issues or health and safety issues, make it very difficult to give a realistic experience of work.

Schools are moving in this way. They are subject to the same study programme rules as colleges, but on investigation you would find the amount of work experience done by those on academic pathways is not as great as those youngsters who are on BTEC or similar vocational pathways.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Could I add something else on Malcolm's prompt? There are further challenges around the logistics for rural areas. Hospitality and catering is often night work, and it is a question of how you get a youngster into work experience and deliver them home safely. Equally, on the lower level, 1, which is people who may not have a GCSE or only one or two GCSEs, they are not always ready to go out to work experience. We work with 500 employers and we do not want to jeopardise the relationship. We will not send them out if they are not ready. That is a bit of a challenge.

Lord Farmer: You were talking about the practical difficulties of placing 3,500 students. From the other side, from the employers' point of view, particularly from small and medium-sized

businesses we have often heard evidence that they do not have too much idea about giving work experience. There seems to be the need for a hub between the education establishments and the employment establishments to channel people into fruitful work experience in the sorts of areas they would like to be. There does not seem to be that, so could you speak to that?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: There is no central hub. I will talk again about Northamptonshire. We have a business unit which includes an employability skills team, and we have had to resource that from precious resources. We have 99% small and medium-sized businesses in Northamptonshire, so we have had that challenge. If you are envisioning a hub that would work diagnostically for a county, that would be wonderful, but I am not sure how it would work because there are so many they would have to manage. We have relationships with the 500 employers that we work with, and we created a project called “100 companies in 100 days”. We had a big marketing campaign and we had 100 employers in 100 days willing to take 100 students, but that is only 100. There is a challenge there and a hub would be useful. We have our own hub within the college.

The other thing we have been doing is looking at the strategy for apprenticeships. We are growing apprenticeships and in our college we have 900 now. Apprentices come in to college on day release or they come in on block release. One thing we have been trying to do is swap that apprentice for a student. If the person is coming in to do electrical block release on apprenticeship, we will try and fit a student back into the employer so the employer does not lose when the student comes to college but, equally, we have an opportunity to move a student from level 1 to 2, which is the GCSE level or below, into a work experience opportunity.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: That is a good idea.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Again, it is the logistics of that.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: There is a great variation in local enterprise partnerships and how effective they are in providing co-ordination. We have the start of The Careers & Enterprise Company, which, essentially, from January next year, is looking to put enterprise advisers into schools and colleges and give some provision there to do the linkup work with employers. Schools—and I cannot speak for colleges completely on this—sometimes find the time required in setting all this up is difficult, and we have that support. Obviously, we will

be interested to see how that develops over the next 12 months as they get their feet on the ground over various parts of the country.

Baroness Berridge: In relation to work experience, we hear a lot in the more academic stream about the usefulness of existing networks and parental support in attaining placements. Is that a factor for these young people as well, or does the way the study programme has been put together mean it is no longer a factor, because it has to be related to the course?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: It is a factor for a minority of students in further education colleges, and I can only talk about my own. Our volumes are 30% at level 3, which is A-level and BTEC, and then 30% at level 2 and the rest at level 1, and the majority of students do not have that opportunity, so we have to find the networks. Colleges network very well with employers and so we have a method of placing students into a reasonable work experience, but it is a big resource and you have to have something back out of it. There is no point in the student going off to make tea; that is not what they are going to engage with. We are trying to meet the employers' needs, and I think FE colleges are really good at being in the community and meeting the need. That means the employer has to be impressed with the work experience, as well as the person on the work experience coming out and realising perhaps they have to learn to work in a team and get better English results as well as being an electrician.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: Pat is absolutely correct there. However, some youngsters will still have an advantage through parental networks and contacts, which Baroness Morris touched on a little bit earlier. Networking does not just work at 14 to 18; it works post degree as well for internships, which does give some youngsters an advantage. If you are a school operating in an area in which the parental group has very little networking or contacts with the type of work that the youngster is looking for, then it is incumbent on the school to go out and do that work. There is a social advantage, if I can use the term, which some youngsters are able to utilise.

Q90 Baroness Blood: Following on from that, we hear a lot about new programmes and this setup and that setup. In your experience, do colleges and schools work together to best support successful education and training for underserved young people?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: We work with the area improvement partnership in Northamptonshire, which is hosted by the college. All the head teachers of the secondary

schools within Northampton town attend, and we work together to try and transition students. We have a good working relationship. The head teachers are very passionate about ensuring that the students are getting the right advice to move on and are getting the right support. I am going to answer the second part in a moment. It works really well, but I think that is unusual. I worked in London for 24 years and I did not see a lot of that. It is probably very good practice. We are also invited to the head teachers' conference every term, where we hear what is happening with Ofsted and why there are such low levels of attainment in Northamptonshire. Then, we can start planning our curriculum. If we think we have far too many on level 3, we can open up some more courses on a curriculum mapped for level 1 and ensure we have the disadvantage funding ready to support the level 1 and 2 students so we are not wasting that money. Disadvantage funding is funding we get in colleges to help disadvantaged groups.

Baroness Blood: That is an excellent answer but how widespread is it?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: I do not think it is that wide.

Baroness Blood: It is good practice?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: It is good practice. I will give you some statistics from my own college. We have 76 looked-after children, mostly refugees, and we have had to resource those youngsters. Their success rate, i.e. the number of them who stay in the college and achieve, is 78%, which is 8% below the rest of the college. That is something we are concerned about. Secondly, we support approximately 1,000 students with learning difficulties and disabilities and hidden disabilities. By that I mean dyslexia, dyscalculia—all that hidden disability that is often very misunderstood. Their achievement figure is 82%, so not as much; nevertheless, it is 4% below the rest of the college.

Part of our difficulty is we do not know who is coming. If we had a wider view of the students who were coming, we could start planning way in advance. When we received our 3,000 youngsters last year who did not have a GCSE in English and maths, we were stumped because we were only expecting 1,500. We have caught up, but we have the logistics of that; we have to fund it against funding cuts, which were 24% at the end of last year, with in July an additional 3.9% and two weeks to implement it. All together that is £1.5 million. You have that constant tension of, "Where do I take that from now? What do I lose?", but at the same time, particularly in Northamptonshire, we have low levels of attainment and we are not

going to give advantage to those who perhaps are not as socially mobile as others. I hope I have answered your question.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: I think that is the exception rather than the rule in what we are seeing. Ideally, we would like the leaders of all our schools and colleges to work together in a regional and area strategy, to ensure that what they are doing is meeting the needs of all the youngsters, no matter what their background or current educational achievement. Unfortunately, the competition there, particularly at 16 to 18, because we are in demographic decline in numbers, means that in some parts of the country we are not seeing the level of collaboration and strategic planning which Pat has indicated.

Q91 Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I would like to declare an interest as Chair of the All-Party Group on Social Mobility and also mention that, because I am going to be asking you about careers advice, about 15 years ago I was deputy chief executive of the Connexions service. What do you think the challenges are facing colleges, sixth-form colleges and indeed schools, to provide high-quality and independent careers advice? We have taken a lot of evidence that not all youngsters are getting the comprehensive, independent advice they need, or being informed of the full range of opportunities, and indeed some have suggested that colleges could act as careers hubs across schools, colleges and employers in their area. I would be interested in your reaction to that.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: I think that is correct. Again it is the unintended consequences—if there is competition you cannot go into schools to give advice. We do not go into schools to give advice unless we are invited. As I said earlier, it is unusual to have the type of working relationship that we have with head teachers, but they are an unusual group of aspirational head teachers. It is really difficult to ensure that 14 year-olds are getting the right advice, because by the time they get to choosing they may well have taken the wrong pathway. In particular, it is difficult at 16, and a lot of students drop out at 17 because they have been given the wrong advice and are on the wrong course, and they have lost a year. As fees start to come down towards 19 when you have to pay, this is going to have devastating consequences for those who are not attuned to finding out how they can reach their destination.

I think it would be excellent for colleges to be the hubs for careers advice, because we are in the business of employability and putting people into work as well as into higher education.

That would be an excellent solution, but at the moment we are on the fringes and it is very difficult to take that forward.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: This is the one area on which Pat and I may disagree. It is the issue about ensuring that the careers advice is independent and is perceived as independent. The difficulty comes once you put it into one institution or one set of institutions. In an ideal world, there should be trust that the advice given is completely independent, but because of the competitive nature it is quite difficult to achieve that at the moment. The key thing is ensuring that youngsters receive an appropriate amount of advice. A lot of the youngsters you are talking about in social mobility need face-to-face advice. They do not have access to that. There is too much, "They'll be able to get it off the internet". I am sorry, but some of these youngsters do not have access to the internet and when they do, they are not accessing the type of thing we want them to be looking at. They need one-to-one advice. They need mentoring and support, information, advice and guidance from the type of person they will listen to. It involves not just a careers adviser but a link with someone, for example, who has been through the school and has gone on a similar pathway and is utilised as an alumnus. I am not talking about HE alumni necessarily, but people who have gone through similar routes to whom the youngsters are going to relate.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: How confident are you that The Careers & Enterprise Company being set up will break down some of these barriers you have both talked about?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: In our local LEP, we have careers advisers going into schools talking about particular careers, and that has worked quite well. The leader for the National Careers Service in our area is coming in to talk to the colleges as well. It is a challenge because, as Malcolm said, there is competition there, and I think we will have to wait and see how it works. It is also very complex and the reason for that is all the reforms and changes in qualifications. You almost need a PhD to understand them. Part of the challenge is how a person gets from A to B without taking the A-level route, and there are several ways they can do that. I am not sure we have that right and I think there is a tension there.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: It is quite difficult. It is too early to say. We have been around this one so many times we should be able to get it right.

Q92 Lord Farmer: In your written evidence you wrote about the 2015 AllAboutCareers survey of 10,000 young people, which indicated that 81% asked parents about careers choices; 63% asked teachers; 45% of parents asked teachers for advice, but 82% of teachers

wished they knew more about the options available. My question concerns careers advice. You have this wealth of emotional support, certainly from families, or a significant other these days; it might be an aunt or a friend. Could we connect schools to that in individually tailoring careers advice to the background; rather than just listening to the pupil, you are listening to the people who are with them?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: I think it is right that most young people will ask their teachers, who do not understand what happens at 16 once they leave the school. In my day, we had a careers teacher in my school. Colleges have qualified careers people. It is a level 4 qualification. The simple answer is to have careers advisers in every school or within a cluster of schools. It is not rocket science. We are putting lots of fancy titles in and getting employers to go in and all the rest of it, but a careers teacher in every school or cluster would make a big difference.

Lord Farmer: Connecting with the family or the background—is there something valuable there that a school can have a connection with?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Connection with?

Lord Farmer: With the pupil's family, who are giving him careers advice anyway, and actually speaking to the teacher about the career.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Schools know an awful lot about their pupils. They will have connections with the family and know what the challenges are in the family. It is whether the family will engage. Some families will engage, and those are the students who will probably do well, because they have parents who can do the research for them, but there are some families who are not able to engage.

Lord Farmer: I understand that.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: The difficulties are such that they cannot get themselves there. The schools know their students, they will know the families and there is no reason why that cannot happen.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: You are trying to raise the aspirations of young people and give them the guidance, but you are absolutely correct in that you need, wherever you can, to engage with the parents as well, in order to ensure the aspirations line up, because often parents have low aspirations for their children, and it is important, wherever possible, to engage but that does need to be on a face-to-face basis.

Could I say a little bit about teachers? A significant number, although not all teachers, will have gone through a straightforward route into teaching. They will have gone to school, university, done their teacher training and gone into teaching. They do not have, and I think it is unreasonable to expect them to have, a broad-based careers knowledge, which is why we need experts with a breadth of knowledge, because the routes into a whole host of careers are many and varied, so it is an expert job.

Q93 Lord Patel: My question follows on from all the answers you have given as to how we might improve on this. What levers can we identify that might make this happen? What role can the inspection regime play in driving improvements in moving people to employment or further studies, particularly for vulnerable groups?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: The Ofsted inspectors have what is called a common inspection framework work, known as a CIF, and within that CIF there is a category about careers advice. The new CIF has just been launched and we are all waiting for it. In fact, some people have already been inspected. That is the vehicle where Ofsted can seek evidence that careers advice is independent and towards the students' destination, because there is no point in having careers advice without the students' destination.

Again I will use engineering as an example because I am from Northamptonshire. If a young person wants to be a chartered engineer, there are several routes into chartered engineering and it is not just through university. If Ofsted is looking at the destination data, at how many students have had their initial advice and guidance, then that should be sufficient to put a focus on careers advice. However, the new Ofsted is just out, it is just happening and we will have to wait and see.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: One of the helpful things Ofsted does is it runs a series of thematic or focused reviews. One of the things it could do is run a focused review on the transition phase to see how well it is working, because in individual reports it will vary according to the skills of the individual team as to what they pick up on, but their focused or thematic reviews are usually very helpful in looking at specific topics.

Lord Patel: Do you think the new CIF agreement will be good enough to drive this? I know it is just about to start and you do not know, but what is your perception?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Ofsted is very diligent in what it does. It follows the CIF. It, too, wants to see students aspiring and moving on. It has also put student progress into the CIF. That is about destination; what you need to do to be that electrician, nurse or media person.

I think they will focus on that. It is whether they have enough time and resource, because again they have a smaller team now. They only go into schools for a couple of days. If a school is good, there will only be a one-day inspection. If a college is good, there will only be a two-day inspection. It is how they deal with that tension against looking at the careers advice.

Q94 Baroness Sharp of Guildford: I want to ask you a question about the current area reviews, which are recommending that there should be fewer, but perhaps larger and more resilient, providers within the local area. As I read it, that is rationalisation and making larger colleges. What effect is this likely to have on the local area and the region which the college serves? What does it mean for competition between the different types of institutions, and between the colleges and schools within that area?

In asking this question, I should declare an interest because I am about to become the president of the AoC Charitable Trust and I have in the past also been both a college governor and the lead chair of a report looking at colleges in their communities.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: One could say this is a set of reviews with a set of nearly predetermined outcomes. The declared interest is in having fewer, larger, more financially robust colleges. We have a number of concerns related to this. This is a review of the structures, but where is the clear vision about what they want further education to look like in the future? We believe that such an organisational review should be focused on what the function is of further education and, therefore, you need the vision to drive this.

It is interesting to note that it is FE colleges and sixth-form colleges, essentially, and not the wider range of providers—not school sixth forms, although they are touched on, a little unclearly, in the nature of the review. It does not seem wholly rational to do a review of 16 to 18 without considering all the providers and how they will fit into the system.

What we would be looking for from these reviews is an outcome that provides a coherent regional strategy for the delivery of post-16 education, rather than predetermining it. Bigger does not necessarily mean more financially robust, and it does not necessarily mean better. We have to have the right outcome that is going to deliver what we want in preparing these young people for their future life and their employment.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: It needs a broader mission. It needs to look at the social needs and the demands for learning. The current reviews are going to be focusing on the higher level of

need and there is a danger, particularly as we are now looking at social mobility within this forum, we are going to throw the baby out with the bath water with level 1 and level 2.

In my own college we have 51% on level 3 courses, which is BTEC and A-levels; the majority are on BTECs and only a small minority on A-levels. The rest are at or below level 2. I have already spoken to you about our GCSE challenge.

I am really concerned that we need to look at the broader mission for the area reviews. They are obviously financially driven. The concern too, as Malcolm has said, is not including the UTCs and small sixth forms of which we have many, which perhaps are not delivering as well as they could do on the financial front, and also looking at the lower levels of support particularly for ESOL—students with English as a foreign language, of whom we have many. There is a skills gap. We have people coming into our country who have those skills, but they do not have the language. It makes sense to invest in them, but again they are lower level to start with, as well as the 16 to 18 year-olds who are lower level. We also have the group with learning difficulties and disabilities. I am really concerned that we are going to be looking at area reviews for higher technical qualifications—quite right; that is what the country needs—but if you plot the curriculum map, people often start at entry level, level 1 or level 2, which is GCSE level. The area reviews need to take all that into account.

There needs to be a local focus and travel-to-learn patterns. My own area review could have 10 colleges in it. We are not at the top of the list, which we are delighted about, because that means we have time to learn. It is not all about merger and there is a lot of talk about merging colleges. Some colleges should merge because they are not financially viable or the quality is not good enough, but other colleges merging will perhaps take five years out of delivering quality outcomes for learners and the travel-to-learn patterns are going to be difficult. Level 1 and 2 students will not travel. They are tasked with barriers that are difficult for them. They may not have the money to travel. There has been a reduction in bursary and disadvantage funding that make it difficult for them to travel. Some of them can just about get themselves into college; I am not saying all of them—and you are all welcome to come to my college and you will not find that at all, because the young people who come to my college are just wonderful and we want to give them the best. I am not convinced that the area review outcomes are going to do this.

There is a cost to them. Apparently we have to save £500 million. Somebody will need to check that figure but I believe that is the case. There is £500 million extra in the HE area. I

will just leave that there and not say any more. I am concerned there is a misunderstanding of what colleges do and how much we contribute to the economy. There is a report from BIS that says we meet seven of the upward mobility initiatives. That is a lot and we need to make sure that area reviews are going to take that wider review.

My other concern is that we have a separation of policy against reform implementation because our policy is to reform all education. At the moment all the qualifications are being reformed. This is very challenging and very difficult for teachers. We are losing teachers. We cannot recruit them. Then we have the funding initiative, where funding is being taken. It is a bit like the Warnock report in 1978 where we had SEND prioritised and funding taken away. I am worried that will happen during the period of the area reviews.

Baroness Berridge: Can I just drill down a bit? Having grown up in a rural area and having seen some of the evidence, I note that some of our most deprived areas are rural areas, and Northamptonshire is very rural. How is your intake getting to college? Is it bus or train? There has been a change in the driving age as well and I am wondering how many are able to get themselves into college.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: The majority come by bus. We have a train but the train is a bus ride away. We have about 150 students coming from north Milton Keynes and they are looking at a journey of an hour and 10 minutes, but the majority are coming by bus within the town centres. I do not know the percentage but I will get it for you. However, coming in from the small rural villages is a real challenge. I met a youngster the other day who was doing catering and it takes him two hours to get to college. If you are doing catering you have to be in on time because they are never late in catering and hospitality, and he is often not leaving until five; he is doing a very long day. That is only one example, but there will be many examples of youngsters who will be challenged in moving to colleges where we have no local provision.

Perhaps that is what the area review needs to do in its wider mission. As Malcolm said, it is about what we want to get out of it. It cannot be merely about money. We are setting up the whole system for the next 20 years so we have to have a helicopter view of how it should look and how best it would be for each area.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: There is a significant cost to those youngsters as well because they have to find the money to get themselves to college.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: There will be a cost for the area reviews if we have significant redundancies and closures. We do not know what that will be. I do not want to be alarmist, because I am hoping that will not happen in our college, and that we will be able to work diagnostically with our neighbouring colleges to map a curriculum that is fit for purpose for everybody, including those level 1 students.

Q95 Earl of Kinnoull: I am enjoying the passion of the witnesses. I hope it comes out on the pages of the written record. The Skills Funding Agency has estimated in a letter recently that the funds available for the non-apprenticeship-related adult skills for those aged 15 and 16 will drop by 24%, a rather alarming number. Thinking about further education colleges, how will that affect, first, 16 to 19 year-olds, secondly, 19 to 24 year-olds and, thirdly, the further education colleges in general, providing as they do education and training?

Mr Malcolm Trobe: Could I pick up the 16 to 19 and leave Pat with the other? The 16 to 19 funding is covered by the Education Funding Agency and not the Skills Funding Agency. One of the things we have seen there is a reduction in the funding for 18 year-olds, so the school or college receives a 17.5% reduction in the amount of funding they get for those youngsters who are on the third year of their programme. A lot of those youngsters are on what I would call a standard three-year programme from 16 through to 19. For example, they might do a level 2 BTEC following on from their GCSEs but then move on to a level 3 BTEC, which will take them a further two years. We are seeing a reduction for those youngsters who are spending three years between 16 and 19 gaining a level 3 qualification, so there is an EFA impact as well as the SFA, which Pat is far more conversant with.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: We have already had a cut on top of several cuts. We had an additional 3.9% cut in July. For my college that has meant £1.4 million.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Out of a turnover of what?

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: £28 million, but if you build it up completely, you are looking at cuts in my particular college of £3 million. Some colleges had to cut £5 million because they had big ESOL provision, students with English as a second language. In our college on the 19 to 24 we cut some of the ESOL provision but to make up for that we also increased class sizes. We already have big class sizes, of 20 students. That is a big class size for students with English as a second language, but we have made it 22. That is putting a lot of pressure on the teachers and we have waiting lists. That is one example.

Secondly, on 16 to 19, as Malcolm said, we have had a cut for 18 year-olds. For a 16 to 17 year-old you have £4,000, compared with a school which has £4,400. For an 18 year-old you have £3,700, but they are in the same class, so they are all on the study programme, because in colleges you do not go up by age, you go up by ability. If you have not had the right careers advice and spent some time doing your AS-levels and decided they were not for you, and you go into college at level 2, you are still in the same class, and we are not going to say to the 18 year-old, "You cannot have that." It means we have to do with less.

Generally in further education it has been devastating. Currently there are 70 colleges in very serious trouble with their finances and another 100 have set a deficit budget. In my own college we have not done that. We have managed to recover by opening up new markets and working very hard to recruit our 16 to 18 year-olds and our apprentices. We are not going to be able to sustain that against this backdrop of cuts. It has been devastating for further education. During the area reviews it is going to be much harder if you are seen to be weak with poor financial outcomes, even though it could be no fault of your own.

Generally if you have a cut, whether it is the FSA or the ESA, it does not really matter, because the college still has to have an estates programme, catering provision, lighting and an HR department. They are just getting smaller and smaller, or you share them with other colleges. The overall impact is that you have a reduced budget and it is much harder to make ends meet, so you are thinking constantly, if somebody is asking for a new member of staff, "Can we afford that? Can we not afford it?"

In our case, we have introduced academic coaches. I never thought I would see the day when I would do that, but I have. It means that some of our lessons are provided by very skilled people who are academic coaches, but they are not teachers and they will look after tutorials or workshops. It is working really well and that is one way we have thought to mitigate continued cuts. However, if we continue to have these cuts, we are not going to be able to replicate the outcomes that we have produced. We really need three-year funding. We have proved as a sector that we can deliver; we have delivered to higher education and to employment with apprentices. We are very robust and we have demonstrated that we are able to change our cultures. Look at what we could do if we had three-year funding: we would be able to plan for three years instead of, in my case, two weeks. I was in Ireland when I got the call about the extra cut and I thought, "What on earth are we going to do this time?" We had to implement another cut on 1 August.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: Could I pick up on one of Pat's points? The base funding level for schools, sixth forms and FE colleges is the same at £4,000. All sixth forms were funded at a higher rate.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Yes, you are correct.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: The base funding rate is now the same. Post-19, it is an understanding of the use that 19 to 24 year-olds—in fact, adults—make of this, because they are using these programmes often to reskill themselves to move into alternative employment or they are looking to upskill themselves, often at their own partial cost, to progress their careers. There is an impact here on people's employability if colleges are unable to put in that provision. We have to be very aware of that. One of the key things we say is that education should not be seen as a cost on the budget but as an investment for the future.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: For a third-year student, a 19 year-old, who has perhaps done level 2 and 3, does that third year come out of your 16 to 18 funding or your adult funding?

Mr Malcolm Trobe: 16 to 18.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: If they have started and they are 19, it is SFA and they have to pay 50%.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: But if they have come through from school and stayed three years, it is the EFA.

Mr Malcolm Trobe: Yes. If they do one year at school and then do two years at college, if they start below the age of 18, it is EFA funding¹.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: It depends on the course. If they are on a year's course and they are 18, fine, but if it is the second year and they are 19, they have to pay.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: That will come out of adult education.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: That comes out of adult education and they have to pay 50% of the fees.

Q96 Baroness Stedman-Scott: What is the one key suggestion you would make to this Committee that we could recommend to improve upward mobility, employment outcomes and better opportunities for young people?

¹ Mr Trobe subsequently confirmed that funding for 19 year olds was "a little complex as it will depend on when and where they actually start the programme as to who provides the funding or whether there is an element of self-funding required. The committee may need to seek clarification on this."

Mr Malcolm Trobe: A coherent strategy would be extremely useful. We have lots of different initiatives but what we want is an overarching, coherent strategy with a clear focus and a vision of what we are aiming to achieve.

Ms Pat Brennan-Barrett: Three-year funding and less reform.

The Chairman: That could not have been more succinct. Thank you very much. Thank you for your passion and erudition this morning; it has been very useful. Thank you.