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Inquiry on

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Questions 96 - 106

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11.45 am

Witnesses: Mr David Nicoll and Mr Charles Parker

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on
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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

Mr David Nicoll, director, Studio Schools Trust and **Mr Charles Parker**, chief executive, Baker Dearing Educational Trust (University Technical Colleges)

Q96 The Chairman: Thank you very much for coming to give evidence to us today. This is the eleventh evidence session in this inquiry of the Select Committee on Social Mobility into the transition from school to work. As I think you know, the session is open to the public. A webcast of the session goes out live and is subsequently accessible via the parliamentary website. A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence, which will also be put on the parliamentary website. A few days after this evidence session, you will receive a transcript of the evidence, and we ask you to check it for accuracy. We would be very grateful if any corrections were sent to us as quickly as possible. However, if after the session you want to amplify or clarify any points you make, you are perfectly welcome to do so via supplementary written evidence. At this stage it would be very useful if you could introduce yourselves and then we will make progress.

Mr David Nicoll: I am David Nicoll and I am the director of the Studio Schools Trust.

Mr Charles Parker: I am Charles Parker and I run the Baker Dearing Educational Trust.

The Chairman: What benefits are there in following an educational pathway from the age of 14, and what effect, malign or benign, does it have on the students?

Mr Charles Parker: If a child is able to make a choice at the age 13 or 14, they will have reached a stage of their adolescent development where that makes some kind of sense. At present the system involves a compulsory transfer at the age of 11 and then a high-stakes

moment at the age of 16, even though we have a mandatory age of participation up to 18. The system may well be out of step with the developmental needs of the child.

Mr David Nicoll: I would largely echo that. We regard these students as young adults. It is an appropriate point at which to start making decisions about which stream they want to follow in the education system, and the schools are designed to offer young people that choice.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: I happen to agree with you. I think it is unanswerable that it should be 14 to 18 and that we should not have this split at 16. At the moment, you are trying to be 14-to-18 in an 11-to-18 system. How much do you think that has been part of the problem with recruitment and some of the difficulties which the UTCs in particular have picked up? Would you go as far as to say that UTCs are pretty dependent on the rest of system changing, because at the moment it must cause a pretty big challenge for you trying to recruit at 14?

Mr Charles Parker: We are an unwelcome intruder into a fairly monolithic system. We represent only 0.4% of the cohort. There are just under 10,000 children in UTCs, but sometimes you would think the roof had fallen in.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Because they lose £4,000 a student?

Mr Charles Parker: You are right; they lose the general annual grant per child when they come to us. Having said that, you describe the problems of recruitment. UTCs are 41% full, after three years of hard grind against a pretty unforgiving system, and I am pretty pleased with that.

Q97 Baroness Stedman-Scott: What is the contribution of colleges, UTCs and studio schools in creating opportunities for underserved young people? For instance, is there any evidence that there are patterns of working-class boys or groups from particular ethnic minority backgrounds being less successful under the current provision?

Mr David Nicoll: We have certainly found that studio schools tend to be established in areas where there is a very specific problem. Local education institutions are often concerned that a cohort of their larger intake simply is not prospering in the current system. Social mobility is not in fact open to that group. In response to that problem, they then tend to propose a studio school or a UTC, so they are responding to a particular demand. It is very early yet, but we found that studio schools have a disproportionately large intake of white British students. There is a good deal of evidence that suggests that working-class white British students, particularly boys—again, there is a gender imbalance in the schools—have done

particularly badly in the existing system, and their parents are often looking for something that will steer them towards success post-education.

Baroness Berridge: I have a specific question about the funding. You said that the pupil grant moves. Does the pupil premium also move with them? Do you have any statistics about the percentage generally of young people who have the pupil premium and the percentage in your schools? Are you recruiting more or fewer?

Mr Charles Parker: Two answers. First of all, yes, the pupil premium moves with the child. Secondly, we think—and it is quite difficult to do this—that the national average of secondary state-funded children on the pupil premium is of the order of 28%-29%. There are 15 UTCs for which there is data, and we think they are about 30.2%. This goes back to David's answer, which is that the drivers that establish a studio school are slightly different from the drivers that establish a UTC, but we are pretty much on a par with everybody.

Lord Holmes of Richmond: Do you have emerging data on the expected career trajectories of the young people who have attended your schools, and if so, what is that showing?

Mr David Nicoll: There is not a huge amount. These schools are very new. The first two were established in 2010, so only two of them have had a full intake go through the system at all. Early evidence suggests, though, that we are seeing an absence of negatives. It is difficult to say much about long-term positives, but you tend to see young people go on to another destination, and that destination is typically work via an apprenticeship, or further education, or indeed higher education. I am not saying that it never happens, because it would be foolish to claim that, but in a tiny minority of cases pupils become NEETs.

Mr Charles Parker: We have provisional data for the 700 students who left UTCs at the end of year 13 in July 2015. Of those, 24% have gone into apprenticeships, which we think is about three times higher than the national average, 13% have gone into employment and 42% have gone into higher education, but, as David says, both our programmes are young, and therefore we cannot report on a cohort of young adults to see how it really beds in.

Q98 Baroness Sharp of Guildford: We would be interested to know what skills young people who participate in a UTC or studio school gain that are different from the skills they would gain if they remained in mainstream education. What are the benefits to young people of the project-based learning that both of you support? How does this type of learning prepare young people for employment?

Mr David Nicoll: Our key concern is not technical skills, although some studio schools do offer a fairly technical curriculum. Our concern, I suppose, is providing general employability skills, because we know that in survey after survey employers say, “What we are really concerned about are the skills and attitudes of young people when they come into our businesses”. When we think about young people leaving the education system and social mobility, it is important to recognise that the situation for them is very different from the situation when I left school, for instance. I was competing directly with other 16 year-old Glaswegians. They are now competing with people from literally all over the world. If you are an employer faced with somebody from Guildford who has left school, let us say, and they have not acquired these employability skills that we have talked about, they do not really know how to engage with interviewers. That day the employer may see a smiling Lithuanian who has been motivated enough to travel here from Lithuania and they are going to employ the smiling Lithuanian. It is a massive problem and we are simply not preparing young people to compete in the labour market. We think that these employability skills are absolutely key. The UTCs may have a slightly different view.

Mr Charles Parker: If I come along behind David on that, in the case of a UTC we operate a long school day. We have not quite understood why schools stop at about five minutes past three. We are able, therefore, to put more into the school day. Forty per cent of the time in a UTC before you are 16 is spent on technical subjects, with 60% on academic education, which of course is critical. That ratio reverses for post-16. The answer to your question is that the different skills include team work, presentation skills, how to turn up on time, how to be ready for work, how to engage with adults, because the average age of the community in both our programmes is around the 17th birthday.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Should the employability skills that you have just described very clearly be part of the mainstream curriculum? Should there be some evidence that young people have achieved a certain standard, so they can say to somebody, “I am ready for work”? I am the patron of a studio school in Rye where we have creative industries. Where you set up a school because there is a particular issue, is that issue predominantly driven by labour market need or because the current provision in that area is not doing it for young people?

Mr David Nicoll: Obviously, there are two parts to this. We believe that employability skills should be part of the curriculum in all schools, and we would like to see our programmes

acting as a beacon to other schools. If this is achieving success, we should be incorporating some of these things into the wider education system. This may be jumping ahead to another question later on, but it is about the purpose of a state-funded education system. The purpose of a state-funded education system is not to serve higher education, which is largely what we believe the current Administration sees as the purpose of that system, but is to produce future taxpayers or people who will contribute in some way towards society.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: I love it.

Mr David Nicoll: There is no point investing £100,000 educating a child to the age of 16 and then having no means of working out whether or not that was a sensible investment. If employers are calling for those skills, all schools should include those skills to a greater or lesser extent.

On the second part of your question, I suppose it is a combination of things. We often get emails from local employers saying, “There is a shortage of this type of skill in our area. How can we get involved with the education system?”, or education institutions have identified a specific issue in their area. In Rye, for instance, one of the issues was there was no post-16 provision of any type locally, so they wanted to do something that would fit with the labour market in that area.

Baroness Stedman-Scott: Do you have anything to add?

Mr Charles Parker: In support of David, we discovered that the world of employment and the world of education are separate to a startling extent. They do not understand each other’s drivers. They do not understand each other’s jargon. In university technical colleges we insist that the governing body is controlled by a majority of individuals who have come either from the employers or from the university that wanted to set up the school in the first place. This is forcing, or achieving, a very happy convergence at local level. It provides a sense of immediacy for what is needed in the educational provision there.

Earl of Kinnoull: My question has been very comprehensively answered. It would have been on employability skills.

The Chairman: That is all to the good. Baroness Berridge?

Q99 Baroness Berridge: What is the recruitment and admission process for the pupils to your schools, and what are the challenges to you of recruiting students at age 14?

Mr David Nicoll: They largely have to use the recruitment process that is used in the local authority area. After the first year they become part of that system. They do, though, have

to supplement this with marketing the school. They have to make parents, and indeed students, aware that there is a different and new option in the area.

Recruitment at 14 is undoubtedly a huge challenge. Many parents are quite passive about their child's education, and asking them to move their child from an existing institution at the age 14, when they have been able to drift through the system, is often quite difficult.

The thing we have been horrified by is the behaviour of other schools in the area. We have often had other schools behaving in a way that you would charitably describe as hysterical. They simply want to hold on to their children because it is in the best interests of the institution, not the best interests of the student. We jokingly refer to this attitude as head teachers regarding pupils as mobile revenue units. It is that £4,000 or £6,000 issue: why are we going to lose £4,000 or £6,000, or indeed why are we going to lose attainments? That is a big issue for recruitment, and we really have to work very hard on that.

Mr Charles Parker: It is true what is said, but it is worth doing because it is in the interests of the children. Their parents see this when we reach them. The system does not make it easy for us, but that does not mean to say we do not do it; we do.

Baroness Blood: You have more or less answered the question. I was going to ask how you seek to recruit as diverse a range of students as possible to your schools.

Mr David Nicoll: There are things that parents like about studio schools and they do not. The things they like are that they are small schools of about 300 pupils when they are full. Parents quite like that, so you often get a disproportionate number of students who have perhaps struggled or even been bullied in a larger environment. Parents also like the direct link with the world of work. Almost any parent you speak to is concerned about what their child is going to do in this uncertain world and uncertain labour market when they leave school, and having a linkage directly to employment is really important.

We also think it is key that the schools are seen as aspirational environments, so although the schools have specialisms—we think of them as themes rather than specialisms—that is only to describe the schools. Parents are not interested in pedagogy; they are interested in whether their child will prosper when they have left the education system. If you can say that your school is linked to opportunities in engineering, the creative arts, the digital gaming industries, or whatever it happens to be, that is often a very attractive thing to emphasise.

Baroness Blood: Do I take from your answer that you have a big connection with parents?

Mr David Nicoll: Absolutely, yes, massive.

Q100 Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I want to pursue this theme you have been talking about of competition versus collaboration and then the worlds of education and employment being very different. You alluded already to a number of barriers to good co-operation between bits of the sector, but what would help you to collaborate better with other schools and providers that are dealing with this same age group so there are more incentives to collaborate and you are, as you said yourself, seen not as an unwelcome intruder in the system but as a beacon of good practice?

Mr Charles Parker: We found that when UTCs come into being—and, as you must know, like studio schools we have only been around for three or four years—the first reaction of the system is to shut them down. I can think of a number of areas and cities where they thought they would shut them down. We persist, and we persist because we are completely backed by the employers and the universities. After a number of years, two things have happened in the UTC programme. The first is that once the teachers, who are after all professionals, have worked out that we are not going anywhere—because we are not—they start to think about how to manage with us and to work together in the interests of children, so that is great. The other thing that happens is that we start to get better known. You will know that there has been no advertising of any sort for either studio schools or UTCs, and we are content with that. We do this by word of mouth. We are already seeing UTCs, and I can think of several UTCs as I speak to you, where the sort of child who is coming in at the age of 14 is very much more closely aligned to the sort of education that is going on in a UTC.

Mr David Nicoll: As with grief, time will heal everything. We introduced a market into education to a group of people who have not had a market before, and that is a difficult thing to suddenly find in your area, but people adjust, and the shorter answer perhaps is that time will take care of that.

Baroness Berridge: Would it be helpful if the Ofsted inspection of schools included a question asking them what links and access they have to studio schools or UTCs? Yes, I understand the point about money, but there are certain situations where a school might have some troublesome children who, although they bring in £4,000, they might want to see out of their system. Have you had that kind of reaction from education, because it helps their league tables if they have underattainers who go somewhere else? That is what I have been told. I am not a teacher.

Mr David Nicoll: There is no question that in some local authority areas, although not all, we have seen pupils who clearly were not suitable for a studio school but their head teacher simply wanted rid of them, for all sorts of reasons. They are told, “If you go to a studio school you will be given an iPad”, or, “You’ve no option. You’ve got to go to a studio school.”. We had one situation where eight children, who were newly arrived in Britain and could not speak English, were steered by the local authority into quite a small studio school, claiming that their parents, who also could not speak English, settled on this complex and new model they had never heard of as their option of choice. You cannot have project-based learning if people cannot communicate with each other. The local authority, sometimes in collusion with head teachers, simply—and I hate to use this word—dumps the kids they do not want in the rest of the system in newly established, and therefore often undersubscribed schools. The truth is that nothing can be done about that under the current framework.

Mr Charles Parker: This has happened to us, although, as mentioned earlier, as far as we can tell the normal distribution of children on pupil premium and free school meals applies to us as to the entire market. The problem that David describes has happened to us but not in such an extreme way. Having said that, we are comprehensive and we have been very excited by what we have been able to do with young people for whom the previous system was not congenial. A young woman from Wigan UTC, who has started as an engineering apprenticeship at Arup in Manchester, comes straight into my head. There is no way that child would have got through that pathway. I have 42 examples in here, but I have that one to tell you about now.

Q101 Baroness Morris of Yardley: I have changed my question. I would have thought you would welcome the eight children who did not speak English sent to you by the local authority. I do not know why you do not, because that is the nature of being a state school and having a comprehensive intake, because if those children do not come to you, they are going to go to someone else who already has a pile of trouble, without your new buildings and your great government support and the rest of it. Some of this ties in with the question I was going to ask.

I am sure you can see that if a local comprehensive school teacher heard what you have just said, they would say, “Welcome to the real world. This is what running schools is like”. Do you want to go back on that? As a teacher myself, I know that one of the great challenges

was to try to do your best, as I think Mr Parker has just said, with the children who do not succeed anywhere else. I can absolutely see that if a child is a damn pain you might be part of the solution, but I thought that was what you were offering.

Mr David Nicoll: It is about proportionality.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: It is for every school, and some schools get an awful lot of these children, and they get them because this is the way the market works, because there are spare places. That is exactly why the average school will get these children: because they have gaps. I am not sure why that should not apply to you.

Mr Charles Parker: You asked us to go back, and I am not going to go back because I did not say we did not welcome children from all sides.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: I think Mr Nicoll did, and I was referring my question to him.

Mr Charles Parker : I am here to help.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: You did talk about welcoming.

Mr Charles Parker: The short point is that we know very well how the system works. We know very well the challenges that our teachers, as much as all teachers, have to put up with. The issue we are reporting on has to do with professionalism. I want the children who come to UTCs, and indeed to studio schools, to have proper records about their prior attainment as opposed to not proper records. I am very happy to deal with people on a level playing field. That is what we are saying.

Mr David Nicoll: I want to emphasise the point that studio schools are not unwelcoming environments for students with a range of abilities. We want these schools to be comprehensive and we want them to reflect their local communities. What is comprehensive in one place is slightly different from comprehensive in another.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Absolutely, depending on the catchment.

Mr David Nicoll: They should absolutely reflect the local communities. What should not be happening and is—and my response is really to a slightly different question—is that in some cases decisions are being made for students that are not necessarily in the best interests of those students. These schools and these local authorities are not making an assessment to say that these pupils would be better here than they would there and this is how they would prosper, or whether they would learn better in an environment with project-based learning or do well in a system that emphasised work experience. They are simply saying, “Local schools do not want these kids. We will push them to studio schools.”

Baroness Morris of Yardley: Is the point that there is no one managing this system? In my view, that is the problem, because if you have a gap in a market you go where you want to go and where a parent thinks you best meet the needs of the child. I am worried about the relationship between you and other schools. That is what I am trying to bottom out. If the parents want to come to your school and you have a gap, that is the way the system works, and it is not necessarily always the fault of some Machiavellian person making life difficult for you.

Mr David Nicoll: If it was the parents who were making that decision, you would be absolutely correct. We want parents, and indeed students, to take an active role in education. The parent bodies at studio schools tend to be highly participatory, because they have made an active choice at 14. What we do not want is somebody else making that decision based not on what is best for the student but on what is best for the institution, and we see evidence of that happening all the time.

Baroness Sharp of Guildford: I know much more about UTCs than I do about studio schools. Do you only recruit at 14 or do you take children younger than that? What is your gender balance? Is it mostly boys, because you have the work practice in it, or is it more mixed? I believe the UTCs have a considerable proportion of boys as distinct from girls?

Mr David Nicoll: Originally they were aimed at 14 to 19. We now have some studio schools that start at 13. Essentially, they start from key stage 4, and that starts at 13 in some places. The gender balance across the piece is 56% boys and 44% girls, but there are massive imbalances within individual schools. The school in Devon, which themes around health specialisms, has more girls than boys. In some of the schools that are looking at engineering, I am afraid to say, despite all the work and advertising that goes on, there are more boys than girls.

Baroness Sharp of Guildford: One quick one to Mr Parker. How do you find the parents react to your emphasis on the longer working day? I believe that you also have very short holidays.

Mr Charles Parker: The parents like it very much because their children are not wandering around in the afternoon. Everybody gets home at roughly the same time and the “homework” has been done. There are two groups who find it slightly more difficult to adapt, and they are the teachers and the children, but we found after really quite a short

time that both sets in the UTC get used to it, as indeed they do in many other countries in Europe.

Q102 Baroness Howells of St Davids: Education has always been a bugbear for people from the African Caribbean community. In the Caribbean, English education was thought of very highly. We always had a problem that people born here are less able to enter into further education, university and so on, because of the teaching they received in the lower schools. Do you feel the education you are providing is helping those children to get on? The Caribbean community spends masses of money getting outside people, who are non-teachers, to teach them and help them along to get them into further education. Is there a problem with the families, with the children or with the education you are giving?

Mr David Nicoll: We found across the piece for boys, and indeed girls from an Afro-Caribbean background, that the percentages are broadly in line with the background ethnicity statistics of a particular area. In some studio schools, pupils from an Afro-Caribbean background are very well represented indeed because their community is also well represented locally. The group we have struggled with in recruitment is pupils from a south Asian heritage. That has been the most difficult ethnicity for us to recruit from.

Baroness Howells of St Davids: There is a change.

Mr David Nicoll: Definitely, there is no question of that.

Mr Charles Parker: If I have understood your question, I have nothing to add to the answer. Similar to studio schools, we are embedded in the locality, and we are established in areas where there are skills shortages. The UTC in the High Street of West Bromwich has a shortage of people going into all the health professions—health engineers and health technicians—and it happens to be right in the middle of a community with a high proportion of children from ethnic minorities. We reflect the communities. I do not think we can help you with special outcomes for Afro-Caribbean, if that is what is behind your question. At least I do not think UTCs can.

Baroness Howells of St Davids: Thank you. I realise that you are not in an area where that is a problem, but for Caribbean people it is a massive problem. One of the things that we have found is that it has been a big issue relating to the Caribbean community. When my children went to school, there was this strong supposition of where we came from, and the result was that we had to take their education in hand for both of them. I wondered if this has changed?

Mr Charles Parker: We have not seen this.

Q103 Lord Farmer: Can we move from recruitment to careers advice and preparation for leaving? What are the challenges and the benefits in delivering careers advice in UTCs and studio schools? How can careers be delivered to meet the government standards for 16 to 18 year-olds?

Mr Charles Parker: Our schools have a highly significant element of work experience as part of the model. From 16 students will often do two days a week with an external employer. At 14 and 15 they will do half a day a week or a day a fortnight. That is important for various reasons, and I will not go into all of them here because it will take too long to answer your question, but the careers advice they are getting is partly through participating in the world of work.

Mr David Nicoll: The world of work is invisible to many young people in a way that perhaps it was not—and I hate to make generalisations about the age of anybody in the room—to us. My father, grandfather and great grandfather were all shipyard workers, and for a long time I thought that I did not have a proper job because I did not work in the shipyards. However, work was highly visible to me and that pattern was common in working-class communities. Now people do not know so much about what their parents do. Take other occupations such as a train driver. It was a cliché 80 years ago that boys wanted to be train drivers. When was the last time you heard anybody say they wanted to be a train driver? Yet on the London Underground they are earning £50,000 to £60,000, and on Virgin mainline it is in the mid to high £30,000s. There are good jobs that are simply invisible to young people. We think that work experience says to them, “Here are things I could do”, or, “Here are things I don’t want to do at all”, because they have sampled that, and rather than a careers adviser sitting in an office with them for however long, they are participating in the labour market. We think that is pretty effective.

Lord Farmer: Do you have specific contacts with certain companies for work experience? Do you have a menu and if you talk to a boy or girl, do you say, “Which of these would you like to do?”. How does that work?

Mr David Nicoll: It would be going too far to say there is a huge choice. There are work experience opportunities for all young people. We see it as important that the work experience opportunities do not relate to the specialism of the school. If you take a studio school that specialised in creative arts, the work experience could take place in the local

Tesco because in Tesco they are learning about reliability, team working, customer service, and seeing how hierarchies work and things like that. The work experience is critical but it does not necessarily have to relate to the specialism.

Mr Charles Parker: We have to overcome a quite colossal image problem. One example is the phrase “creative industries”. I do not think there is any profession that is much more creative than engineering. We therefore have to get over a very large hump of what is or is not understood. We would argue that careers advice in UTCs is second to none simply because of the profound engagement that there is between the employers and the school. I mentioned the control of the governing body and you heard us both talk about project-based learning. This is done by employers both informing and being involved with the projects. One of the problems in recruitment that we did not expect is the number of students who leave us at age of 16. Why? Because they are going off to apprenticeships to work with the employers who tell me they had a two-year job interview. We have many problems, which we have discussed this morning, but this is not one of them.

Q104 Earl of Kinnoull: Can I go back to the topic of work experience? How much meaningful and high-quality work experience is currently going on in the UK? How can you measure whether it is going on into the future? What are the big challenges to obtaining high-quality work experience?

Mr David Nicoll: One of the reasons why we wanted to build in regular and frequent work experience was that when we surveyed the existing system, it did not seem to be very effective at all. Essentially, somebody was perhaps doing a week or two weeks at one point during the course of their studies. It was all done on the basis of, “Can you do us a favour?”, so the employer was asked to do a favour and the child often got nothing out of it.

If I can use a personal anecdote here, the school my daughter attended made a hash of things. I said that she could come to my office and do a week with me; I arranged it as a parent and as an employer. During that week, I received two phone calls from the school, two emails and two forms to complete. It was a bit of a nuisance actually, and all my daughter got out of it was that she never wanted to work with her father. I do not think any of that was terribly helpful.

For work experience to be really effective it has to be regular and frequent. The pitch to employers is quite different then. You are then saying to employers that these young people are part-time employees of yours, that they will be productive and contribute in different

ways to your business. You are not asking them to do a favour. You are offering something for which they can do a very rough cost benefit analysis and decide whether it works in their favour. We have not found the slightest difficulty anywhere engaging employers in this programme.

Mr Charles Parker: You will probably know that virtually all 14 to 16 year-olds used to do work experience. We have no figures after 2008-09 as we think that is the last year they were collected, when more than half a million students had a placement of at least one week in key stage 4. The placements were provided by 404,000 employers, of whom 60,000 had not provided placements the year before. As David says, it is not that difficult. There is no problem with the Association of British Insurers. People understand that children must not deal with dangerous equipment, et cetera. In UTCs, work experience is built in to the project-based learning.

There are only two groups of people I am aware of who have ever been backwards on the London Eye. One group is the hydraulics engineers from Robert Bosch, who have the contract to do the job, and the other is the students from the JCB Academy for whom it is the end of their project working out how to do the job.

Lord Farmer: Coming on to this whole area of the child going into employment, I know the UTCs are funded by universities and employers, and that you have very good connections with them. With the small and medium-sized employers, it is quite complex to have a department that will say, "Let's connect with UTCs and state schools and offer them jobs for their pupils". There are practical difficulties there for each one, particularly if you are small. How do you engage with the local employers? How comprehensive is it, and what lessons have been learnt in this process? What challenges are still to be overcome here?

Mr David Nicoll: Studio schools typically interact with small and medium-sized enterprises and, if their specialism is something such as creativity, often microbusinesses rather than very large organisations. That interaction has been extraordinarily straightforward. The schools simply describe to the employers what they are doing and what they are asking of employers, and the typical response is, "We want to take part".

I am also conscious—and this applies partly to the last question as well—that although we are doing something difficult we are also in a privileged position, because there are tiny numbers of schools that are making that ask of employers. If the entirety of the state system was to do the same thing, it would grind to a halt very quickly. Although there are some

wider lessons to be learnt from what we are doing, I do not think we could replicate it right through the system.

Q105 Baroness Berridge: I have two specific questions. First, do you have any statistics for the percentage of children in your school in local authority care? Secondly, have you had any approaches or are there any plans or research going into whether your model would work more effectively in the young offender institution environment, where often employers already provide work-based placements on the estate?

Mr Charles Parker: No and no. I have no information about this and I do not know the answer to your second question either.

The Chairman: Do you want to make some comments in relation to the previous question about employer engagement?

Mr Charles Parker: Yes. One of the strengths of the model of the UTC is that we are not putting UTCs into towns because some official has decided that a target must be reached. The UTCs develop because the employers and the university in a given region have decided that they need this form of provision. What that does automatically is encourage them to be interested in it. We insist that they control the governing body, as I mentioned before, and you heard about the project-based learning. As David says, we seek to achieve a balance in a given UTC between the large companies, which will typically have a certain amount of capacity to do the work that is needed—and work is needed—and the small and medium-sized enterprises that do not but are very often embedded in an area. For that reason we are developing this very happy merger between these two unfamiliar worlds. You asked about lessons learnt, and again I am nervous of generalisations, but the UTCs with more challenges tend to be the ones where the employment contribution has not been as strongly embedded as in the most successful ones.

Lord Farmer: I may be ignorant, but with the UTC being technical, is there a restriction on the work that pupils can go on to, from the point of view that they are in a technical college, and it might be engineering and what you have spoken about, rather than art or something?

Mr Charles Parker: I do not think so, for two reasons. First of all, we are obliged in the 60% of the time not spent on the technical and the project-based to provide the academic grounding that every young person needs, as we should be.

The second thing, strangely, is that we have moved into a world where, if a young person does not know what to do with their lives and they are numerate, if they understand

engineering and problem solving and how to create things they are not going to be short of work, whereas individuals who have gone up the PPE track some years ago will be struggling more in the modern environment.

The Chairman: Would you like to respond to Baroness Berridge's question?

Mr David Nicoll: I am afraid we do not have any statistics on the number of children who are in care and attending studio schools. Regarding the Prison Service and young offenders, a few years ago we had a discussion with an official from the Prison Service. They approached us because they thought this might work if they looked at different ways to provide ex-offenders with the skills they needed. We know that recidivism is highly related to whether you are employed or not, and if you can make ex-offenders more employable they are less liable to fall back into crime. It is something we would like to see. We have to think about—and I hate to use this word—branding issues, but as an approach, we think it would work in the judicial system.

Q106 Lord Patel: You have both been pretty robust in your evidence and that is good, but I would like to ask what one recommendation each of you might wish to have this Committee make that would make a difference in improving social mobility, employment outcomes and opportunities for school leavers?

Mr Charles Parker: The recommendation that I would make in your position will not be popular.

Lord Patel: We are not bothered by that.

Mr Charles Parker: Good. Everyone in my little world would agree with this, starting with my chairman, and that is that the national curriculum ends two years too late. The national curriculum should end at 14. Every child should have standard education up to the age of 14 and at that point every child should be offered a chance to follow their interests where they lie. This will help children who are otherwise at risk of becoming disengaged, because they do not find the offer congenial while they are going through their adolescence and they do not necessarily have the motivation from home that tells them to knuckle down and get on with it, which goes to your social mobility point. They are offered something that they find congenial, and, in the case of UTCs and the whole technical education piece, that will produce more of the right young people joining the workplace. That is what I would do: I would bring it back to 14 and then I would introduce a range of choices.

Lord Patel: Do we have any evidence from anywhere to back up that proposal?

Mr Charles Parker: The evidence we have is what we have been talking about for the last hour. We have been able to introduce ourselves into this monolithic system where we take children on at the age of 14 and put up with all the difficulties that have been discussed, because we are completely convinced it is right.

Lord Patel: Thank you. That is certainly radical.

Mr Charles Parker: It may be seen as radical. Forgive me, Chairman, I think that it is just following the development of children and the requirements of the workplace; the thing that has not caught up is the system itself.

Mr David Nicoll: I would echo much of that. Having what are, essentially, terminal examinations, GCSCs, in the midpoint of secondary education makes no sense at all, and it distorts everything around the education system. Since Charles has already made that request, the one I would make is slightly more modest, and it is about advice and guidance. Pupils simply are not given a proper sense of what is available to them in their area. There may be rules and regulations that say you can do this, but there are ways for people to wriggle around those. We would like to see teeth given to these regulations and sanctions applied against existing schools that do not give children the opportunity to understand what is available in their locality.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. It has been an excellent evidence session. I thank both of our witnesses and draw the session to a close.