



Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Purpose and quality of education in England](#), HC 650

Wednesday 2 March 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 2 March 2016.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Ofsted ([PQE0031](#))

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair); Lucy Allan; Ian Austin; Michelle Donelan; Marion Fellows; Lucy Frazer; Catherine McKinnell; Ian Mearns; Stephen Timms; William Wragg

Questions 1 – 100

Witnesses: **Sir Michael Wilshaw**, HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, Ofsted, and **Sean Harford**, National Director, Education, Ofsted gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good morning, welcome to this session of the Education Select Committee. Today we have some clear objectives. It is in line with our inquiry into the purpose of education. We want to tease out the thoughts, role and ideas that Ofsted have for the purpose of education. We want to explore how the school inspection system and the accountability framework supports the purposes that they identify and we also want to explore Ofsted's recent findings about the quality of education as gazetted in various reports. We have with us Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector, and Sean Harford, who is National Director of Education. Welcome to you both. It is a pleasure to have you here. The question is this: how important is it for the Government to have a clear and consistent view about the purpose of education and, more importantly, do you think it has one?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Every Government that I have worked with and seen in operation wants higher standards. No Government is going to say they want lower standards. This Government has a very clear view that it wants to raise standards across the country. Certainly they want to see less variation in regional performance. They want to see the academy programme work. They want to see the free school model work. They want to see more youngsters from across the social spectrum doing well.

Q2 Chair: The question is then: well at what?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Education is a good thing, everyone here believes that. I believe it. Sean believes it. It is good for the spirit. It is good for the soul. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. More knowledge is a good thing. All my experience as a teacher and as a head teacher is that when you educate children well they tend to do well in life. The more qualifications they get the more skills they get, the better chance they have to get a good job and to do well in life and to be happy as well.

Just as an anecdote, I took some ex-pupils of mine that I taught in Newham 15 years ago out for dinner; they are all in professional and semi-professional jobs. They came from very modest backgrounds. Some from very poor backgrounds. Half of them went to university, half did not. But they were deeply appreciative of the school that they went to and the teachers that taught them. My job as chief inspector is to ensure that all schools in the country are good schools and that they provide a good education for the children across the country.

Q3 Chair: Do you think that your view has changed about education over the years you have been in the sector, because obviously you have been a successful head and chief inspector for a while?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I said when I came into Ofsted that I thought our system was mediocre. It is a bit better after five years. I believe it is a bit better. A million and a half more youngsters in good or better schools than there were five years ago. Our change of the “satisfactory” judgment to “requires improvement” had a galvanising effect on the system and encouraged more schools to get to “good” and certainly Her Majesty’s inspectors working with those schools that were less than good, did a good job in getting them to good. Primary schools are doing very well, both at key stage 1 and key stage 2. The outcomes are good and our judgments on primary schools are good.

Secondary schools, as you have probably seen from the annual report, are doing less work. Secondary schools in the Midlands and the North are doing badly. If we are going to improve as a system we have to improve our secondary schools’ performance. The fact that we have 45% of youngsters not getting five A*-C grades—if you go to somewhere like the East Midlands where it is more like 50% of youngsters not getting five A*-C grades, including English and maths—and the fact that we have three-quarters of youngsters not getting the EBacc is not good. The fact that the gap in performance between free school meal children and non-free school meal children in the secondary sector has not closed in 10 years is shockingly bad. If you want an overview, yes we have got better but it is a bit of a curate’s egg, and secondary schools are a problem and a problem particularly in half our country.

Q4 Chair: The Department of Education in its submission to our inquiry, basically focused almost entirely on academic knowledge and attainment, which is not unreasonable, but your interpretation is slightly broader. You mentioned having happy children, which is a good thing. Do you think there is some tension between your view and the Department's relatively narrow interpretation of the purpose?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I am not sure I would describe their view as narrow. My ambition at Ofsted is to see children doing well academically. We want our children to read and write well. We want them to go to secondary school and get their five A*-C grades or in the progress they manage to do well. We want more youngsters going to university from across the social spectrum. We want youngsters to have more skills to go into apprenticeships. We do not have that yet. Until we do we will not compete with the best jurisdictions in the world.

Q5 Chair: Many submissions to our inquiry have been peppered with phrases like “soft skills” and “well-being”. That is a fairly generally held view beyond the world that we operate in education as well. What is your view about the role of those skills in education?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I have been in education nearly 50 years and the children that I have taught will say to you, “Why am I in school? I am in school because I want to learn. I want to do well. I want to pass my exams. I want a job”. If they get a job and they do pass their exams and they see themselves as successful academically then they will be happy and contented individuals. The youngsters who go astray are the ones who do not do well in school academically or do not get the right level of skills that they require to get a job. I do not see a huge divide between those soft skills and the harder skills in terms of getting good examination results.

Sean Harford: It is also worth adding that in our inspection framework we have a specific grade on personal development behaviour and well-being and welfare. Within that we look at those things that obviously previous witnesses have said are important. Also, within that personal development, the idea of team skills and things like that, are things we look at and see how schools are developing themselves alongside the academic.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I am always a bit suspicious of head teachers that start a conversation off by saying—we say, “What is the most important thing here?” and they say, “We want our children to be happy”. I am always a bit suspicious of those heads. I am less suspicious of head teachers who say, “I want our children to achieve”.

Q6 William Wragg: Just on that, if we were to replace the phrases “soft skills” and “well-being” with words such as resilience and character, is this a semantic issue or a value-based issue? You are saying there you are suspicious of teachers or head teachers who say they want their children to be happy, but if you replace that with wanting resilient and well-rounded characters, would that change your opinion at all?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: You cannot learn well, you cannot achieve well, unless you are resilient. My job was always, as a head teacher, to build resilience into those youngsters who did not have it—to show them how to do it. Those youngsters who knew in their heart of hearts that if they went home they could not do their homework because of the noise of the television and family life, you try to build resilience into them by ensuring that they did their homework at school at the end of the day. You brought them in at

weekends to show them that they could do it and they could achieve well. So the job of every good school and every good teacher and every good head teacher is to build resilience into those youngsters who do not have it. Youngsters who come from middle class backgrounds have it in spades. They simply do because their parents know how to build resilience into them. A lot of the youngsters that I have taught from poor backgrounds do not have that.

Q7 Lucy Frazer: What you are saying chimes very much with the Ofsted written submission, which is the characteristics that you are interested in instilling in children are the characteristics that make you successful academically. Is that as broad as it gets? Or are we also interested in turning out good, decent human beings who have empathy and understanding, who are well-balanced as individuals? Is that part of the education system?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Our job is to try through inspection to increase—

Q8 Lucy Frazer: I am sorry, Sir Michael, I am going to come on to inspections. What is the role of the school?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Of the school, is to ensure that they run—head teachers have the job of running good schools. Now if they are running good schools they will ensure that youngsters do well academically. If you—and this was always Michael Gove’s thing, and I agree 100% with him—go to any good school you see youngsters doing well at English and maths and all the rest of it, but you will also see them do well in music, in drama, in debating competitions, in a whole host of extracurricular activities. Our job, as a nation, is to ensure that there are more good schools, well-led with good teachers, who can engage in the full breadth of life’s experiences.

Q9 Lucy Frazer: With a view to them having the better skills rather than just being good individuals?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: If they cannot read and they cannot write and they do not understand the nation’s history and they do not understand our place in the world they are going to be limited.

Q10 Lucy Frazer: Coming on to Ofsted’s inspection of that, we heard from Sean that there was a grade for personal development on welfare. What exactly is that and how important is it in the assessment process?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It covers a whole load of things, and Sean can elaborate in a second. But when inspectors go into school they want to look at the culture of the school. Is the culture of the school conducive to good teaching and good learning? Are the corridors calm? Are children engaged? Do children feel safe or do they feel bullied? What does the school do to promote their welfare? What are the assemblies like in terms of promoting the spiritual and moral values of the school? Those soft skills that we have just been talking about.

Q11 Lucy Frazer: I see the culture, how do you measure the individual character?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Inspectors talk to children. They will ask, “Are you being bullied here?”

Q12 Lucy Frazer: What weight does that aspect of the assessment have in your final assessment of the school?

Sean Harford: It is one of the four key judgments, so alongside leadership, management, outcomes, it is one of the four that will then go towards the overall effectiveness, so it is very important.

Q13 Lucy Frazer: How dependent is it on data?

Sean Harford: The personal development? The only data that plays into that will be around attendance, exclusions, things like that. It is more on the outcomes, the things the schools do to make sure children attend and, when they are attending, they attend wanting to learn and enjoying the skills that are around those. That is the only place the data will come from.

Q14 Lucy Frazer: Do you feel that in the short space of time that Ofsted has to inspect a school that you are able to get to grips with the rather more vague concept that is not data driven?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Absolutely. Talking to most HMIs—as I do all the time—they will say, “We can sense within the first hour of being in a school whether the school is any good or not” simply because of the atmosphere in the school, the level of engagement that the children have, the happiness that they exude. The longer they spend in the school they will find why that is happening. It is because of good leadership and good teaching.

Q15 Lucy Frazer: Can I just challenge you a little bit more on it because you started by saying what was important was the characteristics in order to define the success? Are these characteristics—which William talked about, like resilience in and of itself—really the characteristics you are looking for or are they just the characteristics to inform success?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Teachers and head teachers have to ensure that they know their children well. Those youngsters that are not manifesting those characteristics of resilience and the ability to get down and work and to do their homework and to demonstrate independent learning and so on, if teachers know their children well they will build resilience into them.

Q16 Lucy Frazer: So I think resilience is you fail and you stand up and you do it again. That is not doing your homework or something like that.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: That is what good teachers do. “You fail this time; I will help you to be successful next time.”

Q17 Lucy Frazer: How do you measure that?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: You measure that in terms of the performance of individual children.

Q18 Lucy Frazer: But that is academic performance. How do you measure whether they have learnt whether to fail?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Again good head teachers talk to children all the time. If children are saying, “We enjoy school, we like coming here, we think we are doing well. I started off badly but I am doing well now, and the school has helped me to achieve”, that would come through strongly to the teachers and head teacher and we will see it in inspection.

Sean Harford: The problem is with the word “measure” because you immediately start thinking, as you did at the start there, about numbers, when much of this is about talking, as Michael just said, to children, to the teachers, to the leaders about what they to do build those things. They can describe the kind of activities they have in place for those youngsters to build that resilience. You have to make a judgment about that clearly.

Q19 Lucy Frazer: So you can see whether they are doing it but you do not know whether it is successful. You could say we had an assembly on resilience but you do not know whether that assembly was worthwhile or not.

Sean Harford: You could look to see, for example, about youngsters who are excluded and what their response to that is, and how then the school brings them back into the fold and if they are excluded again, for example. You could look to see whether a youngster who was a poor attender previously who then attends better and why that is. So all these things are measures of how the children are being developed.

Q20 Lucy Frazer: Would you accept it is quite difficult to measure this?

Sean Harford: The word “measure” is the difficulty. It is an assessment.

Q21 Lucy Frazer: One other point, we are told all the time when we go into schools—we all go into schools quite often—that teachers do not like teaching to the test. The tests are not only your inspections, but they are also the tests that children are expected to do, which will form some of your data. How do we stop that? How do we encourage teachers not only to obviously produce outstanding academic children who are well skilled in the workplace but also get a wider knowledge of education and enjoy learning?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I never said at any stage of my headship to teachers, “Teach to the test”. I have never met a good head teacher who ever says that. What I did and what good head teachers do is to say to teachers, “Teach well. When you teach well the tests will look after themselves”.

Lucy Frazer: It is all very well to say that—

Chair: Lucy, we are going to have move on.

Q22 Lucy Frazer: Last question. How do you do that because teachers—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: How do you get them to teach well? Through a range of things; first, most heads monitor the quality of teaching, most good head teachers engage in a lot of professional development, they get their best teachers to work with teachers who are

struggling. They promote those people with good practice so they can disseminate good practice to others. There is a whole range of things that they can do.

Chair: We will discuss those in due course.

Q23 Ian Mearns: One of the things that led us to this inquiry was this vexed question about what is the output of our system about. Is it about producing, in a utilitarian way, units for the labour market or is it about producing well-rounded human beings who can function well in all strands of society, including the labour market. There has been a debate raging in the background about what is it we are achieving here. Understandably, as a former head teacher and now the HMCI, you want everybody to be doing well, and you want good head teachers and good teachers teaching well. But is the curriculum that we are using appropriate to the needs of all of our children? Because only 40% of them are destined to go on to academia or that higher stage of education. Is the curriculum across the schools that we have within England appropriate for the needs of 100% of youngsters?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I think I said to this Committee before, as somebody who taught in the 1970s and the 1980s when standards were abysmally low and where this country failed generation after generation of children because of poor accountability, poor teaching and poor leadership, and because Governments did not take as much of an interest in education as they do now. Have things improved? Yes, they have. One of the reasons they have improved is because schools are much more accountable, not just to Ofsted but through the examination and testing system that we have. I would not want those things to go. But you are quite right in saying there will always be a proportion of youngsters—and I will talk about this I am sure in the course of this hearing—for whom an academic curriculum is not appropriate, even in the best of schools. Those youngsters need something that is going to be relevant to them, which they can succeed at, and which will get them to the next stage of their career.

Q24 Ian Mearns: But we still have a huge dilemma because we are being told by employers all the time that the youngsters coming out of this system do not have those interpersonal skills, do not have those social skills, and are not built to learn within a work environment.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It is because they go to poor schools. I am very clear about this. If you go to a good school in your constituency, Mr Mearns, you will see those youngsters learning, achieving well, working with each other in teams, and aspiring to get good jobs. Go to a poor school you will not see much of that.

Q25 Michelle Donelan: Just to follow on from Ian's points. A lot of the written evidence we had suggested that the education system and the curriculum is being marginalised and narrowing. If we look at what we got in our responses to the whole dilemma of what is the purpose of education, it was about the high standards of academia but it was also about the life skills, it was also about the employability of people, producing people that are fit for the workforce as well. So we have all of that in mind. Also creating people that are creative and entrepreneurial and individual thinkers, not mass-producing

people. With all of those things in mind do you think that the curriculum fulfils the aspirations and the aims of our education system?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes, I do. I am a big believer in a core curriculum. I am a big supporter of what this Government is trying to do to ensure that more youngsters do the EBacc. All those things are important. Unless children have a broad and balanced curriculum they are not going to get the full range of experiences that they need in schools.

Q26 Michelle Donelan: I am not suggesting for one minute that we would abandon a curriculum system. I am saying: do you think it is broad enough? Do you think it is focusing on the right areas? Do you think it is benefiting the people it is churning out?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes. Should they do English? Yes. Should they do maths? Yes. Should they do science? Yes. Should they do a modern language? Yes. Should they engage in the creative arts? Absolutely. So I am a big supporter of a core curriculum. Going back 40 years, when schools were allowed to do what they wanted, children did not receive that broad curriculum but in teaching them well within that curriculum you then ensure youngsters become more confident so they can do the sort of things that Mr Mearns was talking about. That they can work in teams well together, that they have confidence when they are speaking to adults, so that when they go for an interview with an employer they can exude that confidence, as they do in the independent sector.

Q27 Michelle Donelan: There has also been a lot of talk about the squeezing out of creative subjects but I would like to ask you about the—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Can I say that is absolute nonsense? Those people who said creative subjects are being squeezed out, it is nonsense. Go to any school and you will see those core subjects being taught but you will also see good music and good art and good drama and debating society. It comes back to this central issue, which I am going to bore you to death with. Our job is to make sure that schools are good schools, led well, where they have a core curriculum and give their children the wide range of experiences that they require.

Q28 Michelle Donelan: What about the impact of the EBacc on STEM subjects? So the D&T subject, being rewritten with Dyson and industry and it is now a very scientific, academic-based subject that is very valuable and enables students to have a taster in that area. We are in a crisis nationally in terms of STEM. We need to push people to go into STEM.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Only because we do not have enough teachers. That is the only crisis.

Q29 Michelle Donelan: But that is not in EBacc so it discourages—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: No, but those youngsters who want to do design and technology should be able to do that. They did at Mossbourne, the core curriculum—

Q30 Michelle Donelan: As long as it is on offer. There is a disincentive for schools to offer it if it is not part of the EBacc, so it discourages students because it is relegating it.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It should be on offer. A good school will have it available to those youngsters who need it.

Sean Harford: We need to remember the EBacc is five subjects effectively out of a curriculum. You only have to go back five or six years, children were taking 14 GCSEs, which was ridiculous. If a school is saying it is too much to put on five core curriculum subjects and they cannot put on things like D&T, there is something wrong with the curriculum design there. It is possible to do these things in good schools, put that curriculum on and it is not an either/or. There seems to be this false dichotomy between you cannot teach children to read and write properly or it is that or making them creative. It is an entirely false dichotomy.

Q31 Michelle Donelan: So you are not seeing a focus, you think, on the EBacc subjects because that is the message we are getting from school.

Sean Harford: Schools I am sure will. They will look to see, “Okay we need to—” because everybody is interested in more children at the moment than the 38% taking the EBacc. Whether it is 100% or whether it is 70%, the debate is there. But the point is, increasing that is probably the right thing to do, but within that you need to be looking at what else is offered for the youngsters, and a broad and balanced curriculum is entirely possible in a 25-hour week in a school in this country.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: But I do agree with you there will be some youngsters who need to do more D&T, who need to do more design, who need to do more engineering and to do more technical and practical subjects because that will help to further their career and it will be subjects that they enjoy and they will do well in terms of an apprenticeship.

Q32 Michelle Donelan: In terms of the PSHE, do you think that making it statutory would improve the standards, because there is this dilemma in terms of the standards being so unequal as well?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: PSHE has always been badly taught in schools, that has been my experience. It is usually bunged on at the end of the curriculum, give it to the tutor to do so you have a physics teacher trying to teach sex education for 15 minutes on a Monday morning. I would not make it statutory, but it comes back to this issue of a good school will know all those issues.

Chair: You would not or you would?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I would not make it statutory, no.

Q33 Michelle Donelan: You are just saying a good school will do it but if it is not statutory there is no—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: A good school is about promoting not just a core curriculum in English and maths. It is also about ensuring that youngsters do understand about personal relations, do understand about sex education, do understand about careers.

Sean Harford: Schools do things because it is good for the children, not because someone tells them to.

Michelle Donelan: But there are good schools out there that do not offer PSHE.

Chair: We have Sir Michael's answer to that, Michelle.

Q34 Ian Austin: Earlier you said that 45% of children are not getting five good GCSEs, which is a scandal, and that the gap is not closing between children from poorer backgrounds and their wealthy counterparts.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: In the secondary sector.

Q35 Ian Austin: But four years ago you said that mediocrity was a settled feature of the education system. What accounts for this persistent failure of secondary schools to improve?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Some secondary schools are doing well. London is doing well. There are parts of the south that are doing very well.

Q36 Chair: But what about the ones that are not doing well, why do they persist in doing badly?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: They are not doing well because leadership is poor. The most critical judgment that we make in a school is on the quality of leadership, because leadership determines everything in a school. It determines the culture. Good leaders appoint good teachers. They remove poor teachers. They do a lot to promote better teaching in a class and a whole host of other things. Leadership is absolutely critical. We banged on about school structures for the last few years, and my advice to Government is to move away from that now and to look at what is happening in terms of do we have a strong leadership programme. What is the national college of school leadership doing? When was the last time you and I heard them say anything about leadership? Have you? I haven't.

Chair: We are supposed to be asking the questions. That is a good point you make.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Do we have a national system to identify good people early in their careers?

Q37 Ian Austin: What is happening in other countries? We are not just behind Finland and South Korea now, but Slovakia, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic. These countries have seen dramatic increases over the last 10 years where education in Britain has been this picture of entrenched mediocrity. So what are they doing about leadership? Has leadership been the answer there?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I do not know. When I retire from this job, that is one of the things I am going to find out, hopefully, and see what they are doing on leadership. But I have said time and time and time again, and I have said it to the Secretary of State, we need to make sure we have a national system that identifies good people with potential leadership capabilities, and moves them into leadership positions as soon as possible. I have put forward a paper to her on the way that that could be done.

Q38 Ian Austin: What has the Secretary of State said in response to this?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: “The Government is looking at it”, But I think it is something that is urgent. It is absolutely urgent because where we see a poor school, we see poor leadership. How are we going to get better leaders in Dudley, and how are we going to get better leaders in Hull and in Grimsby, and in Bradford, where I was yesterday, where standards are miserably low?

Q39 Ian Austin: I completely agree with you about this. What did your paper say? What were you proposing?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: What I am proposing is that you have a strong national college, that it regionalises and the regional directors for the national college would, in conversations with head teachers and executive heads and regional schools commissioners and local authorities, identify people at an early stage, after a few years of teaching: that person has got what it takes to eventually become a leader. Then that person would become an apprentice head and that—

Q40 Chair: Would you mind submitting that paper to us for this purpose, please?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes I will, Chair.

Q41 Ian Austin: I think we should do a session in this. It would be a really good thing for us to be doing. Standards in primary schools, it is said, have risen at a faster rate than in secondary schools. What has enabled primary schools to improve more rapidly than secondary schools? Is that about leadership as well or is that something else?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Primary schools are smaller than secondary schools, they are less complex than secondary schools. The head teacher knows the staff and children intimately well, which may not be the case in a big secondary. There is more collaborative teaching and learning that goes on in a primary, and the focus has been over the last few years in promoting better literacy and numeracy, and we are seeing that coming through. Incidentally, on that, we are going to be producing a very important report that no doubt you will look at, because it was a question that came up last time I was in front of you. We are going to produce a report on whether science and modern languages is being taught as effectively as English and maths in primary schools.

Q42 Ian Austin: Can I just ask one other thing, which is this, that I was really struck by what you said a couple of weeks ago about persistent failure in the north and parts of the Midlands. Now, is that purely down to leadership? What is it about schools in some parts of the country that find it difficult to attract good leaders? Is it something about the school? Is it the importance culturally that is being placed on education? There has to be something else, doesn't there?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I think you can make a success of any city and any town in the country, if there is a national strategy to get good people into those parts of the country. London is a good example of how things can be turned around. I am an ex-London teacher

and head. What happened in London was that political leaders, people like Andrew Adonis and Stephen Twigg and others, said, “We have had enough of low performance in London”. London Challenge was started by them, they brought in good head teachers to show what could be done. Hackney was a basket case for years. Hackney improved quickly because of political leadership. The mayor of Hackney refused to accept mediocrity in that borough. Newham was the same. Newham was not always a good place. It is now, because of strong political leadership and good head teachers coming in and showing what can be done.

Chair: We are going to have to move on.

Q43 Ian Austin: One very quick question. Over the next year, then, as your term of office comes to an end, what is it that you are going to do? You have a year to really make this the issue and demand change.

Chair: It is a good question, Michael.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: What I will do is continue what I have been saying. First of all, Ofsted’s job, we are not policy makers, although I am accused sometimes of spending too much time on policy. We are not policy makers. We report on what we find in inspection, and you know what we have said. What I will do is to say, “We must, as a country, ensure we have enough good teachers and enough good head teachers”. Once we have both, and they are evenly distributed across the country, and particularly in those parts of the country that have languished in the doldrums for years, we will become a better system.

Chair: Leadership is the key there.

Lucy Frazer: Are good head teachers ex-teachers?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Sorry?

Q44 Lucy Frazer: Are good head teachers ex-teachers or could they be businessmen or women?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: They could be from outside. But I have not met one yet. You may have. I have not met a chief executive of the local plumbing firm coming in and becoming a good head teacher.

Chair: That is a fairly clear answer.

Q45 William Wragg: In the future, Progress 8 is going to play a key role in determining which schools you inspect, and I just wondered how you thought one number could be indicative of the school’s overall performance, in determining that inspection?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Do you know, I do not know, because I do not know the details of this yet, but one of the things I am concerned about is that—I am all for Progress 8,

because I think the five A-C thing was far too rigid, so I am a big supporter of Progress 8 as long as it is clearly understood, and as long as parents, for example, know whether—and not just parents, but the school itself and the head teacher know, and the governors know—particular groups are doing as well as they should be. So, for example, are the most able children in the school doing as well as they possibly should, and getting the As and the A*s that they should be? That is why inspection is so important, that when we go in and we look at whether it is a plus or minus, that will not be all. We will want to know how different groups of children are doing, including the most able. Talking about secondary, I am sorry to go on about this, one of the shocking statistics is that—and this came from the Sutton Trust—7,000 of the most able children in the land, who scored in the top 10% at key stage 2, getting level 6 in it, five years later were outside the top 25% for A*-C grades. Five years later they were failing in the secondary system. So that is why inspection will be even more important in Progress 8, to see how different groups of children—

Sean Harford: I think it is important to say that that one number will not decide whether a school gets inspected, anyway, because of the different ways we risk assess and what have you, and it also will not determine the outcome of inspection either, that single number.

Q46 William Wragg: Just on that note, and you say it is not going to solely determine whether a school is inspected, but as a system, of course, it would not necessarily show all the issues within a school around safeguarding or tackling extremism—

Sean Harford: Exactly.

Q47 William Wragg: So you are quite clear, from an Ofsted point of view that, in the future, this should not be solely used?

Sean Harford: No. We have never used a single measure, whether it has been five A-Cs or whether it has been points, or whatever. We have always a broad range of data and, in addition to that, we have always looked at those other things when we are in the school inspecting that Michael said that are really important anyway. So we have never been about one number, or a range of numbers even.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It is so important that you raise that issue, because there are people, critics of Ofsted, who say, “You drive the system through data alone”. No, you cannot, because data does not tell you everything. It certainly does not tell you about safeguarding; it does not tell you really very much about the culture of the school. We have downgraded nearly 200 schools that were outside the published coasting measures where behaviour and leadership have been poor.

Q48 William Wragg: But from the inspection point of view, anecdotally perhaps, is there not evidence that inspectors will predetermine their judgment, based upon the data that they are presented with, before going into that school?

Sean Harford: It is a really interesting point this, though, because if you look at the data around that, I am not sure how predetermined it must have been if 85% of primary schools

are at good or better, because our strict criteria would say they would have to be in line with or above the national average or very strongly moving towards it. If you did the stats around that, you could not have 85% of schools. So it is those other things we take into account, so that I would refute that.

Q49 William Wragg: Just to conclude, on the role of data, are you confident that data provides early warning signs that might help determine whether to inspect or not?

Sean Harford: It is really helpful, though in addition to those data, we also get complaints about schools from parents, that we can investigate and look at. We get local intelligence, so a good head teacher leaving a school can be detrimental to that school or warning notices by local authorities and the regional school commissions. All those things are information we pull in, in addition to the data, so they are all good, helpful warning signs.

Q50 Ian Mearns: William strayed into the area that I was going to come on to, but in September, Sir Michael, you said that you were very conscious that there should be no confusion about the relationship between Ofsted judgments and coasting classifications. Has the relationship been clarified?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes, I think it has been. I have just mentioned that we will do whatever we can to align ourselves with the coasting criteria, and we do. Sean will talk about this. There are 1,000 primary schools where there are less than 10 children in year 6. All it needs is one of those children to go absent, and usually it throws out the data, which could fall into the coasting criteria. But as I have said, we have downgraded and failed a number of schools that are outside that coasting criteria, where we have seen behaviour and leadership to be poor. Data only tells you so much. For example, and I have quoted this before, the year 6 teacher in a small primary school who goes off on maternity leave covered by a supply teacher is going to throw out those key stage 2 outcomes and, when we inspect, we will take that into account.

Ian Mearns: It could be possible, by the way, that the teacher who has gone on maternity leave might be replaced by a better supply teacher.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: That could be, but it might not be. It would probably not be.

Q51 Ian Mearns: I accept that, but the fact that the DFE's classification is purely data-driven, you do see a role for Ofsted in clarifying that?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Absolutely, and I will give you examples. Once we go down the data route we will not pick up things quickly. We will not see where leadership is declining. We will not put things in context, like the year 6 teacher, we will not be able to look at things like British values and safeguarding, and all the rest of it.

Q52 Chair: Sir Michael, just picking up a theme developed by Michelle, what steps do you take to ensure you are looking at individual subjects?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: As you know, we did do that, is it 10 years ago?

Sean Harford: Yes.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Section 10 inspections, when whole teams of inspectors, 10 or 12, would descend upon a school and look at every subject in depth. I was subject to that sort of inspection when I was a head. But what Ofsted found was that in a poor school, poorly led, with a poor culture, weaknesses in English were replicated in science and in maths. It was just that things were going wrong in the school across the curriculum, and that is why our present inspection regime—where we look at leadership and we look at the organisation of the school, the curriculum, the behaviour and so on and so forth—tells us how the school is doing across the curriculum. Now, of course, when inspectors go in, they will already have seen how individual subjects are doing, when we look at the data. A lot of the conversations that an HMI will have with a head will be about a broad and balanced curriculum and, “Why is your science department not doing particularly well?”

Q53 Chair: The problem, of course, is that one subject, perhaps just one, might be stuttering to a halt and nobody really noticing between, let us say, a moment of excellent leadership and an inspection or something?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes. The inspectors will have picked that up on the data, that science is not doing particularly well or whatever. We will ask some pertinent questions of the head teacher as to why that might be happening. Now, if the head teacher does not know that science is not doing particularly well and does not have a clear plan to put it right, that is when the alarm bells start to ring in the inspection.

Sean Harford: But we also need to recognise that schools have been saying for some time, and Government in fact, that the burden of inspection needs to be considered. So, in having 15—and it is more like 10 to 15—inspectors for a week, coming to your school, although it may well have given you sharper evidence and information on that single subject, it also was a big burden on the school. It was also a big burden on the Treasury. So we need to think about all those things in the new world we live in. I think the balance is about right.

Q54 Chair: I can understand the resource issue but, of course, this really goes down to the key question of how do you judge a school, in terms of outputs and subject delivery and so forth, as opposed to the overall performance of the school. I do think that is something that we might want to explore in more detail.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I shadowed two inspections recently and it was very clear to me what the HMI were doing. They would have this hour-long conversation with the head based on what we knew about the school, looking at the data and so on, and would ask questions about the curriculum and underperforming areas of the curriculum, and would seek to find out what plan the head teacher had to put underperformance right. The HMI would then follow those trails through and would go into the science department and go into the English department, to see why those things were as they were, and why a particular subject was not doing well.

Q55 Chair: Recently—I think it was last year—you told us that you were thinking of establishing groups of inspectors with shared specialisms. How is that getting on?

Sean Harford: Yes. What we have done is, of course, we now have about 70% of our Ofsted inspectors are contracted people who are serving practitioners. So they are right at the chalk face now still, and what we have done is we have linked HMI in terms of our inspection practice with a group of Ofsted inspectors. But on the subject side of things, our national leads in the curriculum subjects are now forming groups of Ofsted inspectors and, indeed, HMI. What we have done so far is we have gathered information about each of those inspectors to say which groups might they be best placed with, and then we are working to pull those groups together. I am pulling together our national leads in April, and we are at the next stage of that, so we will take that forward to get those groups moving.

Q56 Chair: So that is an attempt to focus on subject teaching?

Sean Harford: Absolutely. What we are going to do is, say for example, if we want to find out something in geography, the geography national lead will then say, “Right, when you go out on inspection, could you ask these questions about primary school geography?” or French or whatever it is. Then those people, when they go on their routine inspections, will particularly focus on those areas so we can get a view across the country of the state of that subject.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Because of our concern, for example, about the foundation subjects in primary schools, teams of inspectors are now looking at science teaching and modern languages teaching in primary schools across the country, and we will be reporting on that to you fairly soon.

Q57 Lucy Frazer: It sounds like specialists are not asking the questions. Is that right? So if I went into a school, I know nothing about science, I know more about art, there is no point in me asking three questions on science, because I will not understand the answers—

Sean Harford: That is why we are gathering the information about backgrounds of those inspectors, to say who they might be best linked with in terms of—

Q58 Lucy Frazer: Linked with, or that person is going to the school?

Sean Harford: When they go on their inspections, if we know there is a geography specialist in the north-east, what we will say is, “In the next half term, when you go into primary schools or secondary schools, ask these questions about geography. You are a geography specialist”.

Lucy Frazer: Okay.

Sean Harford: That is why we have done it in that way. But, clearly, in a system where you have maybe only two inspectors going into a school, like we do generally, for one or two days, not everyone is going to be a specialist, so that system would not work. You are right about the specialist and the importance of that specialism but, going down this route, we can gather information.

Q59 Chair: There is an issue, basically, about how you use these teams, if you like, in terms of your strategic understanding of where the problems are. That is essentially what you are saying?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: That is what we do, yes.

Q60 Lucy Allan: In my constituency we have recently had a multi-academy trust chain collapse, with all four schools being placed into special measures, and I know that recently you have found other MATs where there have been problems. Does that suggest that the MAT model is intrinsically flawed for improvements in secondary education?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: No, I do not think so. I am a big supporter of a school-led system. Bureaucrats do not improve education, school leaders do, teachers do, and school to school support is the way forward. If the Secretary of State announced tomorrow that she was going to academise the whole system, I would not be against her on that one. But to make it work, it goes back to the point I was making, we need good leaders of schools and we certainly need good executive leaders of schools, because every MAT is led by a chief executive, usually a successful head teacher. Now, if those are not in abundance, then we have problems with the MATs. This goes back to the big issue about leadership, you could be a very successful head teacher of one school, but be a poor chief executive of a MAT, because you do not know how to spread good practice, you do not know how to run a number of schools and what is required, what qualities are required to do that. So that is why leadership is so critical.

Q61 Lucy Allan: So, where MATs are failing, you would say that better leadership is the answer for improvement?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Better leadership, and re-broker so that successful MATs can come in.

Q62 Lucy Allan: In my particular area, I am talking about regional divides. In my particular area, these failing schools all have a very high level of children with free school meals and special education needs, and they were failing to get 27% through on the five good A-Cs. Is that a factor in terms of—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We look at progress. Schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the country do well, get a good judgment or an outstanding judgment where we see good and outstanding progress for those sorts of children.

Sean Harford: But I think you are right, in that leaders who are more adept at providing for those youngsters and making sure they make that progress Michael just spoke about is key. You could not just say that, “You are great over there with all these high-achieving

grammar schools, we will put you in there” and that will work. That is not necessarily going to be true.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: But as the system has become more autonomous over the last few years, there has never been a greater need to find good leaders who know how to handle those freedoms. There has never been a greater need, as schools have come together in chains and trusts, to find great executive heads. That is why leadership is so critical, and that is why we should do a lot more.

Q63 Chair: If this Committee know anything now, it is that you believe in good leaders, Michael.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: But they do not grow on trees.

Chair: No, they do not.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: They have to be nurtured and developed, and properly trained.

Chair: Which is your other point, about what is the national college doing.

Q64 Lucy Allan: In terms of the legislative framework for the inspection of MATs, there has been some debate around that, what is your current view on that?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: My view is, we should have legislative backing on this one. We have that for our inspection of local authorities, we should have it for multi-academy trusts, since this is obviously going to be the future.

Lucy Allan: Are you discussing this with the Government at the moment?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The Government knows my view.

Q65 Stephen Timms: School oversight is getting increasingly complicated, and you have said it is a disappointment that Ofsted and the regional commissioners are working on different regional boundaries. Can you tell us what Ministers have said to you about that and, in practice, how well are Ofsted and the regional commissioners working together?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I think they should be coterminous, for obvious reasons, so that good communication can be facilitated. My regional directors work with the RSCs across the country.

Q66 Stephen Timms: Is it clear what each is supposed to do?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I am not clear what the regional schools commissioners do, other than re-broker failing academies. Sometimes relationships are a bit tense, because we believe that RSCs should be doing more with underperforming academies, not just those ones who fail, and that is going to be a key issue once the Bill goes through Parliament on the coasting schools. So, for example, in Cambridgeshire, where practically all academies are either inadequate or requiring improvement, I know my regional director had a pretty tense

conversation with the RSC about, “What are you going to do about these underperforming academies? Not just the ones that fail, but the ones that will fail, unless you intervene quickly.” Because that is the key thing. When a school is judged to require improvement or is coasting then, unless you intervene quickly, it will decline into inadequacy, and that is a key issue. So the regional schools commissioner has to make sure that he or she intervenes, and use the head teacher boards to support that intervention to improve those standards.

Q67 Stephen Timms: What are Ministers saying to you about the coterminous regions point?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We have not discussed that in any great depth.

Q68 Stephen Timms: I was glad to hear earlier you are keeping in touch with your former pupils in my constituency. You have spoken with approval, and you have done it again today, about the contribution of powerful political figures, like the mayor of Newham and the mayor of Hackney. Is that not a bit inconsistent with the progressive diminution of the local authority role in school oversight?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The point I was making, which was not communicated well in the press that I saw on the subject, is that we are moving to a much more autonomous system. There are going to be more academies and more free schools in the system. Political leadership is about saying, “We do not care where our children go”. The mayor of Newham and the mayor of Hackney welcomed academies into those parts of London—“We do not care about the status of a school and the governance of a school. We want our children to have a damned good education”. That is the issue, and those people have the responsibility of banging the table, knocking heads together and saying, “This is not good enough”, working with the regional schools commissioners, local authorities and with executive heads to demand that standards improve. Those powerful political figures that parents can identify with, that is the thing. A parent cannot really identify with faceless regional schools commissioners, who cover great swathes of the country, but they can identify with a mayor, or a cabinet member who is prepared to say, “We are going to have the best schools in this part of the world”. That was the point I was making.

Q69 Stephen Timms: If all schools became academies, and you have said to us already that you would not object to that, would we still need both Ofsted and regional schools commissioners?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes, you would, for all the reasons that have come through in the course of the conversation that we have had. You need Ofsted because they are independent. That is the most important thing about our organisation, we are an independent inspector. I am not sure the RSCs are independent. Their job is to champion academies. Our job is to say, “It does not matter whether it is an academy or an LA school, whether it is a primary or secondary, whether it is a free school or not, we are only interested in standards”. So you need Ofsted as an independent inspector, to go in and make a judgment on the framework that we have and the standards that we set, and you

need Ofsted to provide you, Parliament, with a picture of national standards. RSCs will not be able to do that.

Q70 Ian Mearns: Sir Michael, you are in the last year now, on the slope down towards whatever you are going to do next, but in your time as HMCI and under your leadership, Ofsted has spent an awful lot of money inspecting what it has inspected. Do you think all that money spent on inspection might have been better spent directly on schools and on other services? Because, when the coalition came in, for instance, there was a significant number of things that were good for children that were done away with because of budgetary cuts. Things like school sports partnerships were downgraded, creative partnerships. So would that money really have been better spent or do you think it has been well spent under your tenure?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: What do you think, Mr Mearns? As I have already said, I remember what standards were like before Ofsted, in the 1970s and the 1980s and the 1990s. Although we are nowhere near where we should be, in terms of the best jurisdictions in the world, we are miles, miles better than we were 20 years ago, for a whole host of reasons, not just Ofsted. But Ofsted has been a powerful lever for improvement. All head teachers, no matter how good they are, worry about Ofsted's judgment, which we try to get right all the time. It focuses minds in a way that no other organisation does.

Sean Harford: A quick calculation is that it is about a fifth of a TA that is spent on every school in this country per year, about £2,000. That would buy you about a fifth of a teacher assistant. That is what is spent on inspection.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The more autonomous our system becomes, the more accountability there has to be.

Q71 Ian Mearns: Now that you have had some time in the job, you may remember that our predecessor Committee, of which I was a member, recommended that Ofsted should be split into two, to look at schools on one side and children's services separately on another side. Have you any more reflection about that?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I said I would give you my considered view after a period of time in office. My view now is that we should cover both. Looked-after children are getting a better deal now because of Ofsted because although they may be in care and being looked after they do go to school. Our championing of the looked-after child at school and asking the questions about their performance has made a big difference.

Q72 Catherine McKinnell: The National Audit Office report that came out last month showed very stark regional differences in the number of trainee teachers coming through per 100,000 pupils for 2015-16. How would you account for these differences and what specific work do you know of that is being undertaken in regions that we know have significantly lower numbers than other regions, for example, the north-west and the south-east have fairly high numbers? My region, the north-east, has a worrying figure.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: This is a real worry and one of the curses of our system is the huge variation in regional performance and that will only improve if we get enough good

teachers into parts of the country that do not have enough teachers. This is a big issue for the Government. The Government has moved over the last few years towards school-based training and away from HE. That is fine, I am not against that, as long as this new model ensures that there are enough good teachers to cover the whole country. In my annual report I said that one of the problems that inspectors see is that in this school-based model good schools, who were at the centre of a training partnership, are snaffling up the best teachers. The ones that are not good, those schools outside those partnerships, are suffering. Where you have lots of teaching schools in the country there is not a problem. In the cities, for example, lots of teaching schools, not a problem. But in coastal areas, in rural areas, where there are few teaching schools because there are not enough outstanding schools there for those schools to become teaching schools, that is a real problem. That is an issue, again, for the National College of Teaching and Leadership to ensure that this new model of training teachers works well, is managed well and covers the whole country well, not just those schools in the cities and not those parts of the country where there are lots of outstanding schools.

Q73 Catherine McKinnell: Would you say it is too early to tell whether this shift in towards the school-based training, away from university teaching, whether that is going to have a positive effect on what we know is a challenging outlook for teaching recruitment?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I think it is too early, all we know is that there is a shortage of teachers. There is a particular shortage of teachers in those parts of the country that need good teachers more than others. That is an issue for the Government and for the National College.

Q74 Catherine McKinnell: Speaking from a region where we do have some of these concerns in the north-east, SCHOOLS NorthEast, which I am sure you have heard of, represents 1,250 schools in the north-east region, they have said very clearly that schools are facing an uphill battle, nine out of 10 head teachers, roughly, are saying they are struggling to recruit, three-quarters of head teachers say that they have concerns with the future. Would you say these very serious concerns are reflected across the country or is this a specific issue for the north-east?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: No, it is reflected across the country. Again, in my annual report, we looked at the north-west, we looked at the east of England and we looked at the south-east. Three-quarters of head teachers that we spoke to, particularly in challenging areas, were saying they were having real problems in recruiting staff and good staff and particularly in the secondary sector.

Q75 Catherine McKinnell: Okay. Not all trainees will go on to find permanent jobs in the area in which they train but an awful lot will. What work do you know is going on to ensure that there is better matching within regions but also that it is helping to encourage teachers to move out of the area that they have trained in if that is the way to find a good job?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes. Most teachers do stay in the area in which they have been trained and that is why it is causing such severe problems in those areas where there are few training places. What we have to do as a country is to make sure that we get more people applying for teaching and for training. We are not doing that successfully at the

moment and that is a real worry. All the great improvements that we have seen over the last few years, they could be undermined unless we tackle this very serious issue.

Q76 Catherine McKinnell: How do you think we could tackle that?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The organisation of training needs to be properly addressed in the way that I have just described. We have to make sure that the image of teaching improves. If you look at the best jurisdictions in the world the status of teaching is very high and we have to do the same here. We have to make sure that teaching is seen as a great job to go into. We need to talk up the profession—all of us involved in education—whether in the unions or head teachers or teachers need to say how good a job it is. So much that we hear is negative, workload, difficult job, badly behaved children and so on. We have to start saying that this is one of the most noble jobs in the world and we don't hear enough about that. The publicity around teaching has been poor, although the starting salaries are pretty low in relation to other graduate jobs, if you are a good teacher you could be a head of department in a secondary school on £50,000 or £60,000 before long. Head teachers now of secondary schools are on over £100,000 a year. Chief executives of multi-academy trusts are very wealthy individuals. We should publicise that. If you are good and you want to make teaching your career, a leadership career, you can do very well financially.

Q77 Catherine McKinnell: Just one last question, Chair, we know that you believe very strongly in good and strong leadership, that has come across. As you said, it does not grow on trees. I know that your annual report says that you are going to be looking at this issue, what exactly are you planning to do?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I have submitted a paper—it is only in very draft form—to the Secretary of State about where I think we should go. Apart from inspecting leadership in individual institutions, we do not inspect the National College for School Leadership. One of the things that you have to do as a Committee—far be it for me to tell you what to do—is to look at this very important institution and what proposals it has to get better people into our schools.

Sean Harford: We have a survey coming out in the next couple of weeks as well on leadership management and succession planning, so that will be published.

Ian Mearns: We couldn't snaffle a copy of your paper to the Secretary of State on that as well, could we?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I will send you that paper.

Q78 Ian Mearns: I will declare an interest: in a previous life I was chair of the board of a not-for-profit careers company in the north-east of England. I know that in another evidence-gathering process we have heard that there never was a golden age of careers education and guidance in this country, but we could all say that it was probably better in the past than it is now. Probably in the era just before the invention of the connection service, I would say it was probably about as good as it was at any stage. You recently said that careers guidance in schools was uniformly weak, why do you think it is so poor?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Because it is not given the priority it deserves by our teachers. I have said to you before, I always saw it as absolutely integral to school success and school achievement because once youngsters know that by working hard and passing their exams there is an end result to that and that they can go on to this job or that job, is absolutely fundamental to improvement at school success. I never saw it, and I think no good head sees it, as a bolt-on, an add-on. But that demands commitment from the leadership. It demands that somebody is appointed in the school at a senior level to organise it properly and organise one-to-one interviews and bring in external agencies when necessary. It means that senior person has got to liaise with the FE sector and with local employers and so on. It is a big job and it can only be done well if it is properly organised and properly led and it is given a priority by school leaders. Unless it is, then it will carry on performing poorly. We are not bringing out another survey on careers, but it is certainly a priority. Do you want to talk about the priorities given on inspection now?

Sean Harford: Yes. Just to add to what Michael said, the importance that schools put on laying out all the options for youngsters, especially in apprenticeships, for example, that is an important thing that is not at the forefront of schools' minds necessarily because they are often thinking, "Well, these youngsters are going to go on to sixth form college or stay in the sixth form of the school", and so on. Those children who will not do what Michael said and pass all those GCSE exams at that point in their life—the 45% we were talking about earlier—there have got to be other options for them. Some of these bright children also will go into apprenticeships but laying out for a youngster what those routes are is important. The drive from the Government for 3 million apprentices is a really good one, if they are high quality and we get youngsters going into them.

Q79 Ian Mearns: Are you going to give, therefore, more priority in the inspection process?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We already are.

Ian Mearns: Because, for me, careers guidance on its own is not enough, careers education, information, advice, guidance is part of the package.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We already are, Mr Mearns, we already are. If you look at any of our most recent reports in secondary schools, you will see a lot more has been written about careers provision.

Q80 Ian Mearns: You will be aware that the AoC, Association of Colleges, has taken issue with your statement that careers guidance is also uniformly weak in colleges. What evidence do you have to support this assertion?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The evidence of inspection and the destination data. I think they are pretty poor at collecting that destination data and are quite happy when they phone up somebody and say, "Where are you working?", "I am doing a part-time job at McDonalds", to just leave it at that and not chase it up and find out exactly what their career progression is.

Q81 Ian Mearns: The destination data is the end of a process, what about the careers education—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: As I say, on the basis of inspection evidence.

Sean Harford: Study programmes, the 16 to 19 study programmes, the outcomes from that over the last couple of years have been really weak and iffy. Of course, a big part of that is not only those young people achieving English and maths level 2 by the age of 19, it is also work placements, careers guidance, being ready for work, though only about a third to 40% of those are coming out good or better.

Q82 Ian Mearns: It is a long question this one, so I am wondering if you can actually provide this as written evidence to us, Sir Michael, in terms of how you are going to go about making the inspection of careers information, advice and guidance more rigorous in the future?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We will do that.

Ian Mearns: Thank you very much indeed.

Q83 Ian Mearns: Lastly, Mary Bousted told our Sub-Committee that if Ofsted were given more responsibility to inspect careers guidance they will do it badly, how do you respond to that?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: What a cheeky thing to say. Why? We have a trained train HMI, we have ex-head teachers as successful—

Ian Mearns: I think Mary sees it as her role to be cheeky, yes.

Chair: We are going to move on to further education with the benefit of Marion's experience.

Q84 Marion Fellows: I was an FE lecturer in Scotland, which, of course, is different in all sorts of regards, but I was very interested to see that when you did your inspections of general further education colleges two-thirds were not doing terribly well, requiring improvement or inadequate. Can you tell me why you think—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Because the FE sector is in a mess, that is why the Government is reviewing it at the moment and is considering radical proposals for restructuring. It is not very good, is our view at Ofsted, that youngsters who don't do well at 16 often don't do well two years later, particularly in English and maths where the results are pretty poor. We see all sorts of stuff going on in the FE sector that is not good, that too many youngsters are put on level 1 courses when they should be challenged to do level 2 or even level 3 programmes of study because so much depends on success rates for the funding and that is an issue for the Funding Council. They are quite happy to put X number of youngsters on a level 1 course when they should be doing much more than that and that is something that is said in too many reports that I have seen.

Q85 Marion Fellows: If I am picking you up correctly, Sir Michael—you will have to forgive my ignorance of this in England—if the college were to put a student on to a level

2 course and they failed, that would definitely affect their funding, they would get less money—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes, it is more completion of the course that they would—

Sean Harford: The problem has been that they have been put on a level 2 course when they have already achieved level 2 outcomes elsewhere, so it is the progression they are not making is the issue. You are right but getting the curriculum right for the young people is the key to this. The big drive at the moment with 16 to 19 study programmes is finding colleges out. They have struggled to find English and maths specialists to be able to deliver those courses and the wider areas they are finding harder in terms of work readiness. The thing that is taking it down to the figures that you just said is mainly around the study programmes.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Completion of the course, rather than whether these youngsters have been challenged to go on to the next level. We also find in too many GFE institutions that they have not thought carefully enough about their curriculum. The curriculum is often irrelevant to the local workplace and national employment needs.

Marion Fellows: Just as an observation in Scotland, all courses in FE colleges have to contain an element of core skills, maths, English—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Which is what the Government wants from the FEs, which is badly taught and the results are pretty poor.

Q86 Marion Fellows: Yes, they are embedded in the courses in Scotland. Do you think colleges have the capacity to deal with the increasing number of—you have just said, haven't you? You don't think they have the capacity. Do you have any ideas as to how they would get the capacity to be able to teach—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It is a real problem at the moment and there are real funding constraints. There are big problems in terms of the financial viability of many of these institutions. As a result, a number of them have amalgamated and consolidated and they are very large institutions at the moment, and I am not sure they are delivering what the nation needs. You know that the Government is committed to 3 million apprenticeships, committed to passporting the funding to employers. Employers will have to then make the choice as to who is best to train apprentices, therefore, they have to be confident that the local trainer—usually the GFE college— is the right institution to provide high-quality training. A lot will depend on the advice that employers are going to get on where the training should be provided. When we produced our apprenticeship report not so long ago, we said that that is pretty easy for a big employer but for a small—and most of our employers are small or medium-sized enterprises—they need a lot of help, a lot of support, a lot of advice on where to get the best training.

Marion Fellows: Yes, that seems so and—

Q87 Chair: Can I just ask a question? Marion's question about maths and English is an important one because, of course, at all of the failing colleges we see these students who perhaps are not up to standard in maths and English, so that is a pretty difficult starting point.

Sean Harford: It is. The expectation though is that those who achieved a D grade at GCSE should be able to achieve a C or better by the age of 19 and that should be doable. The big delivery issue for GFEs is getting the right people to deliver the courses and, of course, salaries in GFEs are lower than in schools. If you are fighting in a market for good English and maths teachers and salary is important to you, you may well choose to teach in a school, as opposed to a GFE.

Q88 Chair: But there is a wider point, isn't there? If a school leaver is heading to an FE college with pretty low standards in maths and English, that is, first of all, a commentary on the education system where that person has come from?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes, absolutely.

Chair: Secondly, it is a fairly big challenge for some FE colleges if that cohort, generally speaking—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: My view—again, it is a bit of a policy thing this but, never mind, I am going to say it—is that 16 to 19 should be done in a school-based environment and not in an FE institution. Often when you talk to lots of head teachers they will say their weakest and most vulnerable youngsters who need a secure and often a small environment or an environment that they know well, head off towards the FE institution, which is a large amorphous 10,000-sized institution on a number of campuses, and do badly. They get lost and drop out.

Q89 Marion Fellows: Just again, you said some of the reasons why there have been amalgamations, it is to do with funding and to do with money and all of that, my experience is totally different, that will be because I worked in a smaller college and I also worked in bigger ones. What I found and what was the general theme is that 16 to 19 year-olds who did not do well in school quite often did not like school, saw college as almost a fresh start—again, you are back to good teaching and good leadership. It gave them an opportunity to totally change around—I have personally taught young people like that—because they were doing a vocational programme that interested them. Yes, they had to do the maths and English but they knew they had to do that to get the vocational qualification.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: But that is absolutely right, as long as it is a high-quality, well-taught vocational programme and often we don't see that in FE. This is a great opportunity, now that schools are moving together into clusters and federations and chains, that if I was running one of those chains I would have primary schools, I would have secondary schools, I would have a couple of UTCs there as well. I would know those children really well. I would make sure the progression was really good and, most importantly, that the vocational offer that we were providing was of high quality.

Q90 Marion Fellows: Okay. I have had the experience as well of schools in Scotland who have special wings that have vocational qualifications like hairdressing and different things. But still going back, a lot of children don't like school and it has negative connotations, so if they can be brought into another—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I accept that but improving their outcomes is the big issue and making sure that the courses and programmes of study that are laid on are relevant to them.

Marion Fellows: The other issue is, of course, adult returners into education who can do incredibly well in further education because they have a second chance and can transform lives.

Q91 Catherine McKinnell: We know that apprenticeship stats, Sir Michael, for 16 to 18s have fallen from 43% to 25% since 2009-10, and it has remained at the figure for the last five or so years. Sir Michael, you gave evidence to the Committee in September that you felt that 6% of youngsters at 16 going into apprenticeships—or just 6%—is a disaster. The Skills Minister, when he appeared before the Sub-Committee, gave his view that, “It has to be for employers to judge the age at which they want to recruit. I am just saying I don’t anticipate a huge increase in the proportion of that cohort”. I am just wondering what your view would be on squaring that circle.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: If that is the Minister’s view, that is the Minister’s view but there will be some youngsters at 16 for whom a starter apprenticeship would be the right thing to do. As long as it was of high quality, that it was not the low-quality stuff that we saw in our report, that it led to progression from level 2 to level 3 and it was in the right area of work, then that is fine. But a very small number go on to apprenticeships and I suppose that is what has changed over the last 50 years. A lot of youngsters at 16 left to go into apprenticeships years ago and did well, that isn’t happening now. There will be lots of employers who think that youngsters are not ready at that age but there will be some employers that would be quite happy for youngsters of that age to go into apprenticeships.

Sean Harford: The Minister may well be right about the age of 16 but the figure hardly shifts at age 18 either, it is something like 7%, I think, and that is probably even a more key indicator. Everybody agrees it can’t be right that you have 45 year-old apprentices. It has got to be about getting to an age where apprenticeships mean something, getting a young person ready for a job with that firm, that is what it is. The 16 to 25 is the key but 18 is really the key.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It goes back to that previous question on careers, unless youngsters know what an apprenticeship is, what it can lead to and what sort of job they can get at the end of it, then they are not going to apply in the numbers that they should.

Q92 Catherine McKinnell: One of the issues that has been raised with me by local charities but also businesses and indeed your own report looked at it as well last month, is barriers that are put in the way of young people going down the apprenticeship route. One particular example I have seen very recently is someone with a learning disability but also businesses have raised this issue where that isn’t a factor at all. There are many individuals who can be highly skilled at the technical side of an apprenticeship—a welder, for example—but they struggle to get their grade C GCSE maths or English. I just wondered what your view of that was in terms of the apprenticeships as a route and what seems to be a significant barrier for some people who can do the practical side of it but cannot achieve that level of—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: The barriers should be knocked out and there are lots of barriers. Poor careers education is one, not knowing how to apply for an apprenticeship. Do you apply to the college? Do you apply to the employer? The funding arrangements, all of this is the responsibility of the school careers department and that is not happening, as we have already said. But it is so important for our country that those for whom a purely academic curriculum is not the right answer can see a route to a good job through high-quality apprenticeship programmes, not the ones that we reported on that are simply accrediting low-skilled jobs already being done. But in terms of the English and maths, I just want to repeat what Sean said, if they have a D grade then they should, after two years, be able to get at least a C grade. Those who have not, who have Es and Fs and so on, if the employer is happy that they have—

Catherine McKinnell: Is that while on the apprenticeship programme? The problem is getting on to the apprenticeship programme in order to then improve your maths and English, they can't actually get on to it without the C.

Sean Harford: Yes, that depends on the level of the apprenticeship you are going on to and what the eventual employer would want from it. But the point is it is important for a youngster to have the basics in English and maths. The question is whether the GCSE is the right vehicle for it, that is being chosen at the moment. The Government has shown flexibility in looking at things like the wider qualification of mathematics, it is not an A level but it is harder than GCSE and so a youngster has got another qualification in mathematics. Maybe we need to look at that but what we don't need to do is going back to dumbing it down to something that is purely functional skills that then we found that colleges were delivering and they didn't mean anything because the youngsters still couldn't read and write properly.

Q93 Chair: Through raising that point, are you suggesting that a numeracy test less challenging than a GCSE would be one way forward?

Sean Harford: It is about what is in the curriculum for those subjects. If you are putting on an English qualification as truly equivalent to level 2, it might not necessarily have to include the things that were in English GCSE in terms of literature, for example. Everyone has got to agree—employers, students, the colleges—that this is the right kind of curriculum. It is not dumbed down, but it is right for that qualification.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: It comes back to the first questions on secondary schools. We need more secondary schools to achieve well for their whole ability range.

Q94 Catherine McKinnell: I have one other question. It is a practical question because a number of organisations—FE colleges and also employers—have raised concerns with me about the upcoming new apprenticeship levy, how it will work in practice. It is due to come into operation from April 2017. At the moment there is a bit of lack of detail about exactly how it will work in practice, who will pay in, who will get the money out, how it will affect SMEs—many of which are responsible for taking on apprentices, not responsible for paying it, so will not necessarily directly receive back from it—and also this big issue of a race for quantity over quality and the concerns. I just wondered, to what extent are you involved in the discussions to ensure that we have a seamless transition, which, at the

moment, many people worry about and that it will be 16 to 18 year-olds that fall through the gap?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We have said on frequent occasions that one of the most important things that has to happen, if apprenticeships are going to improve and the 3 million that the Government propose are going to be of high quality, is that the local organisation—run, hopefully, by the CBI or the Chambers of Commerce or the LEPs—has got to be good because most employers are SMEs, employing fewer than 20 people. They need help, they need support, they need to be shown how to support their apprenticeships. They don't want to get involved in lots of paperwork. If we want more employers to get involved then there has to be an organisation at local level run by the Chambers—which is what happens in Germany and what happens in Switzerland—to ensure that the organisation is good and that the training is also of high quality.

Sean Harford: We are in discussion with BIS over all of this anyway.

Q95 Ian Mearns: Chair, Sir Michael has intimated that he has got a real question on his mind about quality-assuring the 3 million apprenticeships. I think you did say that we didn't want to see re-badged poor quality training schemes being classified—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes. Our report was shocking really, some youngsters didn't even know they were on an apprenticeship programme and they were accrediting low-level stuff. That has got to change. What must not happen is the 3 million are rolled out without that quality assurance, and employers have to ensure that happens.

Ian Mearns: But the mechanism for ensuring the robustness of these training regimes locally doesn't exist. The Chambers of Trade, the Chambers of Commerce in regions like mine or all around the country are nothing like those sister or brother organisations in places like the Republic of Germany, they are very different.

Sir Michael Wilshaw: But why haven't we done that? If we are really, really serious as a nation about high-quality apprenticeships to ensure greater productivity, then why haven't we organised those LEPs and those Chambers of Commerce at a local level in the way that Germany and Switzerland have done?

Ian Mearns: Because there is a belief among people driving policy that some invisible hand will come and provide this mechanism.

Sean Harford: But it is all about quality because we know of great employers who are working with other great employers who are setting standards. I was talking to BT the other day and they are working with PwC and they are setting up an accountancy apprenticeship; they are doing it really well and it is going to deliver a high standard. It is doable but Michael is right in that the small employer are the people here who need the support.

Chair: Yes, that is an important area that we are looking at through our joint inquiry on productivity.

Q96 Ian Mearns: It is vitally important, Sir Michael. I think you don't see a role for Ofsted in this or you may, but even if you don't see a role for Ofsted, have you been thinking about a template that will be used on a regional or sub-regional basis to assure quality?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: You are quite right, it is not our job. Our job is to report on the standards of apprenticeship programmes and we have been very critical. We have said in that report that if those apprenticeships are going to improve they need to be well organised by employers, by the LEPs and by the Chambers of Commerce at a local level. We have said it more than once. It is policymakers that have to bring it about.

Chair: I thought you were going to mention the leadership of the local LEPs and all the rest as well just then.

Q97 Marion Fellows: One point to raise is, Sean, you said nobody wants to see a 45 year-old apprentice and I take on board what you said but can I just say that some people do, some employers would? Certainly, in Scotland they do because no one has a job for life and I know it has a bit to do with retraining. Can I just read this one bit, "You can be an apprentice at any age, although funding is usually only available 16 to 19 or 16 to 24"? But then it goes on to say in Scotland, "Adults of any age can become apprentices".

Sean Harford: Can I just clarify then what I meant? What we don't want to see is a return or a continuance of people who can already do a job competently just being given apprenticeship funding to get a qualification, that is the issue.

Marion Fellows: Okay, that is fine, thank you.

Chair: Yes, that is a very good point. Sir Michael, we know you are retiring at the end of the year, so Stephen wants to—

Sir Michael Wilshaw: I will have to get another job at the end of it.

Chair: Stephen wants to ask you a few questions about your successor.

Q98 Stephen Timms: I notice that my former boss, Estelle Morris, wrote recently that you served the education system well and I agree with that. There is some speculation about who your successor might be. Can you tell us what qualities you think they should have? What do you make of the recent speculation that Ministers might be quite keen to get somebody in from the US charter school system to take over from you?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: An invitation to Donald Trump might be in order obviously here. What qualities are required? I hope I have been a passionate advocate for higher standards. You need somebody who is going to be a passionate advocate for higher standards in our system. You need somebody who can identify where the issues are and what will lead to higher standards. You need somebody, above all else, who values Ofsted as an independent inspectorate. Our credibility comes from everyone out there seeing that Ofsted is independent, that we inspect without fear or favour and that we will challenge the system to do well, including Her Majesty's Government. That is really important. Once that independence is lost our credibility is lost. You need somebody who is going to champion Ofsted's independence, that means they have to be brave sometimes, put up with the sort of nonsense I have had to put up with from time to time and be a passionate advocate for higher standards. In terms of looking abroad in America, I have already said

publicly that the American system doesn't do as well as ours and there are plenty of good people here.

Q99 Stephen Timms: As we have been discussing this morning, you have responsibility for further education and also for children's services, should Ministers be looking for somebody with experience in those areas?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Possibly, possibly but you have to be a fast learner in this job. I knew very little about social care when I joined four years ago. I knew very little about early years or prison education. You have to learn quickly. If somebody is appointed from a social care background then they have to learn pretty quickly about schools and about FE.

Q100 Stephen Timms: Going back to the point about charter schools, your point may well be right about the overall quality of the US system but there are good bits of the US system, including some of the charter school chains. Is that potentially the background that would be good?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: Yes. If somebody from America is appointed, fine and I have just talked about being a fast learner, they would have to learn pretty quickly about the culture in this country and the curriculum and the assessment systems in this country. But if they appoint somebody who is sharp and is bright and who is hard-working, that is perfectly possible.

Q101 Stephen Timms: What advice would you give to someone who was thinking of applying for the job?

Sir Michael Wilshaw: We heard a lot about resilience earlier on, be a resilient character because Ofsted is not the most popular organisation in the world but we perform a very important and vital function.

Stephen Timms: Thank you.

Chair: Michael and Sean, thank you both very much indeed for some very useful answers there. We have probed this issue about what is the purpose of education, not least the link you drew, Sean, between the curriculum and assessment and, Michael, your steadfast belief in good leadership, all points very well noted and well taken. Thank you very much and thank you all.