



Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy

Oral evidence: [Careers advice, information and guidance](#), HC 670

Monday 7 March 2016

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- Careers England ([CAD0042](#))
- Career Development Institute ([CAD0076](#))
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([CAD0045](#))
- West of England Local Enterprise Partnership ([CAD0089](#))

Members present: Mr Iain Wright (Chair), Paul Blomfield, Neil Carmichael, Michelle Donelan, Amanda Solloway, Stephen Timms.

Questions 71 – 119

Witnesses: **Katharine Horler**, Chair of the Board, Careers England, **Virginia Isaac**, President, Career Development Institute, **Paul Warner**, Director of Policy and Strategy, Association of Employment and Learning Providers, and **Adam Powell**, Director of Skills, West of England Local Enterprise Partnership gave evidence.

Q71 Chair: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Joint Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills and Education Select Committee and the Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy. We are looking at careers information, advice and guidance and we are very grateful that you have come here to Westminster Kingsway College to give evidence to us. For the purposes of the record, could I ask you to introduce yourselves and tell us where you are from?

Adam Powell: My name is Adam Powell. I am Director of Skills for the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership. We are a small team seeking to build the economy and create jobs in the Bath and Bristol region. Prior to that I was head of employability and enterprise at Bath Spa University with the Careers Service overseeing the university's employer engagement.

Katharine Horler: I am Katharine Horler. I am Chair of Careers England. Careers England is the trade body for employers in the careers sector, but I am also Chief Executive of a charity called Adviza who deliver careers guidance in the Thames Valley area.

Paul Warner: My name is Paul Warner. I am Director of Policy and Strategy at the Association of Employment and Learning Providers. We are the trade body for work-based and work-related learning providers across England, mainly independent providers but a number of colleges and employers as well.

Virginia Isaac: My name is Virginia Isaac. I am here as the relatively newly-elected President of the Career Development Institute, the CDI. We have approximately 4,500 members who are all either career practitioners or very interested in careers. I am also a member of the Quality in Careers Standard Consortium, which appears in some documents, and I chair, for Careers England, the Quality Task Group. But just to give you a little flavour of my background, I am not a careers adviser. My last substantive position was 15 years at UCAS, higher education, but also with the Quality Assurance Agency and before that setting up various enterprise businesses including bottling spring water.

Q72 Chair: Thank you. This is the first Committee meeting that we have had outside of the Westminster bubble. It is really nice to get out into the real world and I am grateful to Westminster Kingsway College again. It has been fantastic day and a fantastic visit, so thank you very much for that. May I start with a question to all of you: how do you rate the current provision of careers information, advice and guidance in schools and colleges in England? Adam, may I start with you?

Adam Powell: Yes. I think it is patchy and fairly inconsistent but I do think it is an improving picture. There are many examples of good practice locally in the west of England but also nationally. There are recent interventions, be that through a more targeted approach to National Careers Service delivery, and indeed the focus on trying to tackle some of the issues, the bringing together of the business community and education partners to try to improve careers education information, advice and guidance and seek successful employability outcomes for young people. I think there are some very compelling data suggesting that things are moving in the right direction. It is clear from some of the work that we have done understanding the challenges that schools are facing at the moment that there is still a fair way to go.

Katharine Horler: I would say, again, very patchy. Careers England has been involved in a number of surveys of schools and the delivery of careers guidance in schools. I think what we have seen over at least three surveys is very little change since the statutory duty was introduced in 2012. The good schools have stayed good and the average schools and the poor schools have stayed average and poor. I think it is disappointing that we have not seen enough change, so that is what contributes to the patchy nature of careers guidance across the piece.

Q73 Chair: Is the gap getting wider? Are good schools getting better and the average are getting worse?

Katharine Horler: Yes, the good schools are getting better. I think the gap between them is getting bigger. Just to give you an example from our area in the Thames Valley, 131 schools buy services from us for careers guidance provision and they buy between one and 120 days, with the average being 30 days. That is a considerable reduction in what they would have got in the past, but you can see that if somebody is only buying one day a year they are really not getting very much provision. That is just a local example for you.

Paul Warner: I concur with everything my two colleagues have said. At the risk of just repeating everything they have said, it is patchy, it is inconsistent. From the experience of our members, perhaps I might disagree a little bit with how much it is improving. It is improving. It is coming from a very low base over the last few years so that it is better in terms of the fact that more schools are doing more with regard to careers guidance and some of them are doing a very good job, others aren't. But it is the case of it is very ad hoc and what the whole system lacks is some form of coherent strategy across the piece so that everybody can say that is the sort of direction for good practice, that is the sort of thing you should be doing. At the moment it is very fractured and very much trial and error, and that is rather worrying.

Virginia Isaac: I think it is variable. There are some excellent examples of good practice. There are 1,100 or so state schools that now have a quality award, which very much interprets the Gatsby benchmarks, the what and the how. There are excellent examples there. One of my roles is Chief Executive of Inspiring Futures, which is a social enterprise, and we service a large number of independent schools and again there are a lot of very good examples of these, some of them are cited in John Holman's report. The reason I am optimistic is that after all the reports that have been issued about the state of careers guidance, the fact remains—and the fact the Government are taking it seriously now—is that people are waking up to the importance and value of careers guidance advice, education and information and so at least there is an awareness now. Now it is our job to try to build on that.

Q74 Chair: That awareness was not there before?

Virginia Isaac: From my perspective—and colleagues here have greater experience with Connexions—is that because it was a service that was provided, schools did not have to really think about it so much and then suddenly when they were charged with having to start commissioning services, this was something that they just didn't know how to do. When the Connexions service was stood down, schools were very confused about how to go about this. It coincided with a lot of commercial players coming into the market thinking, "Good, we can start selling services". I think it is now schools are beginning to realise, and a lot of them absolutely do, that it is very important and certainly we are seeing where there are committed senior leaders that they are grasping this now and then starting to make it happen.

Katharine Horler: What we have seen is where schools are making decisions to invest in careers provision in their schools, they are taking it much more seriously. Particularly when they are paying for services themselves, when they are putting together packages that help senior leaders, they are taking it more seriously. It is more highly publicised to young people, parents, governors, so there it is very good. It comes back to what I was saying and I think that is about ownership, that they have taken ownership of something that they are making a decision about commissioning.

Q75 Chair: We have heard from your opening statements some really quite important words and phrases: ad hoc, patchy, fragmented, variable. Why is the provision of good careers advice across the board so patchy and fragmented? Katharine, may I start with you?

Katharine Horler: It goes at different levels. Firstly, it is about commitment, so how important is it to the school? Those of us who come from the careers sector would say that it is the glue that holds everything together. It is great to have fantastic academic success for young people in your school, but if they leave school and they are unemployable and they do not have employability skills, you have not completed that job for the young person. There is a moral point here about making sure that we really make a difference.

Q76 Chair: Virginia, do you want to come in? I was struck by your point earlier on where you said schools are beginning to realise the importance of this. Isn't it that schools should have always thought that preparing their students for the world of work is absolutely essential and work experience, good careers information, advice and guidance is absolutely central to that? If that is the case, why has provision been so weak and patchy?

Virginia Isaac: Absolutely. What is the purpose of education if not to prepare young people for life and work? I have no doubt that most teachers who are consummate professionals recognise that this is important, but the structure of the school day, the pressures on the curriculum, the emphasis on academic results, league tables, exam results is such that although many schools in an ideal world would love to do more, they see it as a discretionary extra. When you put on top of that all the other PSHE commitments that they take very seriously as well, it just seems that they say, "We can't fit it all in".

Q77 Chair: We have been here at the college today and we have been to an 11 to 18 school earlier on today. These are fantastic examples of integrated good careers information, advice and guidance. Why aren't more institutions like that? Are there any particular reasons?

Paul Warner: I think it has to do with the fact that, as we said earlier on, there was once a strategy. Then it was left to schools to take things forward and you have to understand that within the schools there are some very variable drivers as to how they want to go about this and why they want to go about it. You are absolutely right when you said that what is education's point if it is not to prepare them for work and further learning. As we said in our submission—and I have seen more quoted on social media forums this morning, as it happens—again and again we are going into schools or our providers are going into schools to talk about industry and options and learning and employability. Most of our members, for example, are particularly concerned with apprenticeships and are told on a regular basis, "You can come in and talk to as many pupils as you like but not those ones because they are going up to the sixth form, they are for A levels, they are for universities". We have actually been told, "We don't want them to have the option of apprenticeships".

Q78 Chair: I want to come back on to that in a moment. We certainly want to talk about apprenticeships. Adam, you wanted to come in?

Adam Powell: Yes. I was just going to answer your question about why it is so patchy. It is probably worth saying that there is not a silver bullet here. There is not one right way to do this, depending on your learner profile, the students who have particular needs, the location of the school, the local economy. There are multiple reasons why different approaches to careers education might be different in different areas. The incentives the school have as to why you might want to think about pupil destinations often are not there. Evidence of success can be progression to Oxbridge universities and not necessarily to outcomes that might suit the learner, whether that is apprenticeships, local employment or further education of any kind. I think a lot of it comes down to the buy-in of understanding at a senior level in the school sector—that is heads, governors—around the overall embedded approach to careers and employability. Too often we still hear about, “We have somebody coming in on a Wednesday afternoon doing careers advice”. It is about cultural shift and embedding the notion of preparing your students for the future across the school.

Q79 Chair: Paul, I want to pick up on the point you made a couple of moments ago about whether good information, advice and guidance is tailored around the needs for education. It could be that you are seen as somehow academically successful and put on to a path that might exclude other paths that you might be quite interested in. How do we ensure that when we think about career guidance it is tailored around the needs of the individual rather than the institution’s ones?

Paul Warner: There are a lot of points there but it is primarily that cultural thing as Adam was saying, an understanding that it is about a number of different practices. As much as anything else, it is about the capability of the individual who is delivering the careers guidance in the first place. They should be able to understand what options are out there and to be able to make an accurate judgment fairly quickly about what are the best options for this particular person who is front of them. Unfortunately, within too many schools that we come across at the moment with regard to apprenticeships, there appears to be the belief that what is good for a young person is to go to university. Only if they can’t go to university, then we will have to think about apprenticeships. That is not the way to think about it and that is a cultural shift, but again if we had standardised good training in place across the board for careers provision that would start to underpin the ability to deliver the quality career guidance across the board, and that is what is missing.

Virginia Isaac: I think there is no doubt that we have entered a very complex world now in terms of the options available for young people. Work has changed, influenced by globalisation and automation, all these things. In my day there were very few choices, relatively speaking. Just concentrating, worthy and understandable as it is, on certain target audiences like the NEETs is no longer sufficient because every young person needs to have support at the appropriate time. It comes back—and I am sure we will talk about this—to careers education but also professionalism in terms of those advisers being able to draw out of a young person their strengths, interests, weaknesses and to help coach and guide them, help them understand themselves better. That can only be done on a one-to-one basis and probably it could be done by somebody in the school but it needs to be done—it is almost a three-way arrangement. There are the people in the school who know the young person well but it is also having that element of external impartial expertise coming in as well.

Katharine Horler: I wanted to pick up on an angle we have not covered so far, which is about parents and the role of parents in all of this. If a school was not teaching maths, parents would be asking lots of questions about why it was not teaching maths, but often parents know very little about this area so they are not asking questions of the schools about, “What are you doing to prepare my child for when they leave?” Parents also don’t understand the range of options that are now available for their sons and daughters. They don’t understand the complexity that Virginia has mentioned. It is a double whammy really because they don’t know what the school should be providing and they also don’t know about the range of options fully available to their son or daughter. I think the whole angle of parents is one that probably needs looking at a bit more.

Chair: You have talked several times about the standardisation of standards and that is something that we would like to look at as well.

Q80 Amanda Solloway: There is a matrix standard for careers advice providers that has 13 different quality awards for schools. Do you think there should be a single standard for all organisations?

Katharine Horler: Can I just correct one thing? Matrixes for careers providers and quality in careers standard pulls together individual careers awards for schools. The 13 is the QiCS, the quality standards, and matrix is for careers providers.

Amanda Solloway: It is, yes. Sorry, that was my fault.

Virginia Isaac: I think it is a very important distinction that we must make. Matrix: just looking at information, advice and guidance and the processes that underpin that and the extent to which companies are delivering, evaluating and improving what they do. The quality in careers standard, which currently is delivered by 12 different organisations across the country, quality awards, so they are all standardised from the point of view of the consortium, they are for schools to apply for. Those are absolutely correlated now with the Gatsby benchmark, so very much telling the schools how they can go about it and what they need to do. That will include things like publishing the careers plan or having contact with employers and colleges. A single thing would be lovely if that was really pushed. It has appeared in Select Committees before, but that seems to be one very simple mechanism that could be used to encourage and persuade, possibly even fund schools to go for that award.

Katharine Horler: Just to build on that in terms of standards, what you are looking at at the moment is a completely unregulated market so anybody can give careers advice. It does not matter whether they have any background whatsoever. There is nothing that guides the parent or a young person about how good the quality is for a provider. If they have got matrix you know that they have passed a certain benchmark. If you are a National Careers Service prime, which Adviza, my company, is then you have to have a matrix standard. It is a requirement that if you are an NCS provider you have to have matrix, but anybody could go and deliver careers guidance in schools and they don’t have to have a quality standard, don’t have to have matrix. I think what you are looking at is a completely unregulated marketplace, which makes schools, young people and parents very vulnerable.

Adam Powell: In the west of England, employers felt that the various benchmarks available in standards were not necessarily meeting their needs. In 2012 we decided to

introduce a tool called the employability chartermark that was an employer-led solution based on 12 measures that are very closely aligned to the Gatsby measures. What has happened over the last couple of years is that 90% of our local secondary schools have participated using the self-assessment tool. Going back to the earlier point about culture change, it is starting at the top with senior leader buy-in and a clear action plan of how we can involve local employer partners.

One of the key benefits, however, has been the peer support that schools have been able to utilise working together. We often hear about academies working within multi-academy trusts but this was bringing together multiple schools within a local area, particularly those with responsibility for careers and employability, and sharing good practice, feeling supported and having a clear action plan. We have heard locally that Ofsted, for example, viewed favourably schools that had taken part in this process because of that employment engagement. It is a tool that we have developed locally. We have aspirations to share it further but we just tried to get our own house in order first to ensure that it is working in the west of England schools in the first instance.

Paul Warner: Just linking back to talking about parents as much as anything else, it is incredibly important there is some form of standards and quality of the ability of any individual or website or organisation to be able to deliver good quality careers guidance but those accessing it must be able to understand what that standard means as well. I think from our organisation's point of view, we would not say necessarily there should be just one standard. There may be a number but nor would we want a complete plethora of them because that dilutes it. It is important that what we have is good and it is recognised by everybody who needs to access it. From personal experience, my 14 year-old daughter has been looking at careers sites herself and through her own research she came across a careers site on the internet the other day that was clearly giving some erroneous information. I just happened to look it and said, "Well, that's wrong" but she did not know and that would have taken her down the wrong path.

Q81 Amanda Solloway: I was going to ask that later, but is there is a consensus on what the quality standards should be?

Katharine Horler: Careers England promotes a three-pronged approach to quality, which is that schools are encouraged to do a quality in careers standard award, that providers get a matrix award and that individuals have a level 6. If you have those three bits right then that would mean that you had a high standard of service across the board. There are three things: QiCS for schools, matrix for providers and level 6 for individuals.

Q82 Amanda Solloway: Paul, just coming back to what you were saying about your daughter, how can we ensure that they are getting reliable information?

Paul Warner: It comes back to making sure that there is an awareness of what careers guidance can do. At the moment we are, as was said before, in a completely unregulated market. It is overstating it for effect but it is a little bit wild west and it has been for years, although maybe we can argue it is getting better now. We do need to bring together what the standards are and some form of recognition if there is level 6 training going on in careers guidance, for example, and this demonstrates it is a complicated task. This is something that

should not be taken lightly and we should lead parents and others to expect they should be able to see evidence of this sort of expertise in whichever way it is they are accessing that service. Too often that is just completely not there at all.

Katharine Horler: Just to summarise that, if you were getting financial advice you would not want to go to a financial adviser who did not come under the remit of the Financial Conduct Authority, and this is the same. Your daughter is looking at stuff that is wrong and it is out there and there is no way of taking it off the web. It means that young people are getting access to information that takes them in completely the wrong direction.

Q83 Chair: Who should be the equivalent of careers information, advice and guidance to the Financial Conduct Authority?

Katharine Horler: I don't know, but I think we need some kind of way of pulling the whole thing together. It can do huge harm. If somebody gets given the wrong information about a career trajectory at the wrong point in time, then that door is closed to them. If they choose the wrong A- levels, that route is no longer available to them at all.

Paul Warner: We have talked about parents, but it is really important that schools have the chance to understand how good or otherwise is the information they are getting. Some of them are being inundated with small niche provision or fairly ad hoc provision ringing up and they don't know whether this one is better than that one. If there was some way of them being able to recognise, "This is something I should be looking for", but at the moment I don't think there is. There are some, there are things like matrix they can look for, but there are some good websites that don't have them; there are some good services that don't have them. They should be an awareness that this should be looked for, something that should be all together, but before you ask, I don't have the answers.

Q84 Amanda Solloway: I was going to say, do you have them? Virginia?

Virginia Isaac: There is the two-pronged attack of the Quality in Careers Consortium that sets the standards and then the providers who go for one of these quality awards that enables them to provide that to schools, then schools are reviewed every two or three years. You are getting quite a virtuous circle there, not expensive, whereby they are looking at schools, they are looking at providers to make sure that things are monitored and evaluated. There is a process in place there that is working pretty well. I would agree one would not want to keep expanding it so that you have more and more quality award providers but 12 across the UK seems to be quite reasonable and then matrix is the sole one for the providers. I don't think we want to reinvent things if it is working.

Q85 Amanda Solloway: Adam, I was just going to come to you, perhaps a little bit on your employability chartermark would be useful. Has it been tested with employers?

Adam Powell: It absolutely has, yes. We have piloted a chartermark for employers that recognises the great effort that many businesses are putting in to invest time in supporting in the school setting. I think we can't overestimate the local dimension in this in that schools will often draw from local areas, local communities. Many will not venture

beyond their local areas for employment, whether that is during term time or post school, and meeting the needs of a local economy, the buy-in from local employers has been critical for this to be successful. The feedback we have had from schools and employers is it has been a catalyst for change, using the voice of the SME. Too often the blue chip and the FTSE 100 is the attractive business to try to snare to come in and speak to your school, but it is the voice of the vast population of the economy in driving productivity to say, “We have a range of small businesses that could provide you with probably greater or equally as great career progression” and that comes from the local co-ordination as much as possible.

Q86 Stephen Timms: I apologise for my late arrival. I wanted to pick up a point that Katharine made a minute ago about individuals having a level 6 qualification, as referred to in your evidence and Virginia picks up the same point. Why do you think that is important and how realistic would it be to impose that requirement on advisers?

Katharine Horler: First, why is it important? I think it is because you can see a different type of interaction with a young person when somebody is working at level 6. We had our matrix assessment last year and 90% of our staff are level 6 qualified. A small number of staff are level 4 qualified. What the assessor commented on was the fact that she saw a significant difference in how those interactions took place and the difference was around challenge. A level 4 person would tell somebody information, show them options but they wouldn’t challenge. If a young person came and said, “I want to do engineering” they would say, “Yes, fine” and tell them how to get into engineering. A level 6 person would be saying to them, “What makes you think you want to do engineering? What kind of engineering? Have you got the right qualifications? Do you understand what is involved in that role?” She noticed there is a huge difference between the two roles.

The National Careers Service is currently doing some evaluation of advisers’ work and they also have come up with identifying there is a big gap between level 4 and level 6 and the focus around challenge and raising aspiration, moving young people forward for those that are operating at level 6. That is the first half of the question and I am afraid I have forgotten the second half.

Q87 Stephen Timms: How realistic would it be? You said the vast majority of your advisers are level 6.

Katharine Horler: In terms of realistic, it is perfectly possible to do but the challenge for an employer—and obviously Careers England is representing mostly employers here—is who funds it. We fund the level 6 qualifications for all our staff. In the National Careers Service contract there is an expectation that we should have as many staff as possible at level 6 but it is a very tight payment-by-results contract where there is no money in it to pay for people being qualified for level 6. For the work we do in schools we charge our services on the same rate as a supply teacher, so again there is no margin in that to pay for level 6. We are a charity and we don’t have to make a return to anybody so we invest some of our reserves into training our staff so that we do have them all at level 6, but it is a real challenge for employers. There has been no investment in professional development of the careers sector in a very long time. I have been in careers for a long time and I have not seen investment in the careers side of work probably for 20 years.

Q88 Stephen Timms: If we were to look at other providers, I think we would not see such a large proportion of advice, I have to say. Virginia, you made reference in your evidence as well.

Virginia Isaac: Very much so. Inspiring Futures employs on the whole only level 6 qualified careers advisers. We are a UK-wide organisation. The CDI has a register of over 1,100 qualified careers guidance practitioners, but we have to distinguish between whether a careers adviser or a career leader. All these different people join the CDI, but the register is for qualified careers practitioners.

A related question is around provision of these qualifications and that probably is patchy. We see that it is growing, for example, in Scotland because people know it is worth investing in that level 6 qualification because there are going to be jobs. I think there is more of a degree of uncertainty here, but there are new courses coming on stream. There is a masters course coming on at Derby and, although there have been some London universities that have closed their courses, there are new universities that are now opening London campuses.

Going back to why level 6, I think there are probably three main reasons. One is, and we have touched on it before, understanding quite complex behavioural issues of a young person and helping guide them in the right direction is something that does take skills and experience and knowledge. There is a lot of theory behind this and different techniques that careers advisers can use. Secondly, understanding all those different routes now, whether it is apprenticeships, higher apprenticeships, degrees, work experience, all these things, that also takes quite a lot of knowledge. Thirdly, and I know it has been referred to before in different sessions, the very great value of the LMI information and people understanding that. I think we would all probably put in a plea to please keep that LMI for all going one way or another.

Those are three areas that do take quite some expertise and knowledge. Having said that, I think it is important that we should not say that everybody who is involved in careers has to have level 6. It is a bit like saying everybody who works in the national health system has to be a consultant. There is a kind of careers ecosystem and this has been documented by quite a few of the professors who you saw the other day. You have the careers educator or careers leader that is at the centre in the school. They are working very closely in partnership with qualified level 6 careers practitioners who might come into the school, not on an ad hoc basis but quite regularly. Then you have the senior leader, the senior head or college principal who puts their weight behind it, so you can start to build up that with the employers coming in, with volunteers coming in. That has been mapped out very well by Derby University for Teach First and there is a very good model there that Teach First is trialling at the moment.

What I am saying is that there is room for all in this careers ecosystem. We must not get hung up on any one particular qualification, but they are very different roles and if we can pull that together that will be very welcome.

Q89 Stephen Timms: Can I just pick up your point about some university courses closing, which you noted in your evidence as well? Am I right that these are the courses that would enable you to get level 6? Is that right?

Virginia Isaac: Some have. London South Bank is just running its course for one more year and East London did close, but there are some more coming in in London. I think what we are starting to see is a slight shift. If a profession is to thrive and evolve, it also has to adapt to modern circumstances. One of the questions was about was there a golden age; whether there was or not we have to prepare for the new, modern age. One thing we are looking at at the CDI is: is it just a qualification in careers guidance or should there be a qualification in careers guidance, career coaching and career education? Those are the three prongs, again, of what a young person will need. As has been said, we do not want the one size fits all. Different youngsters will need different support at different times, but if there is a clear methodology there, then it is much easier for schools to understand.

Q90 Stephen Timms: Just explain to me when would somebody typically undertake one of these courses? Would it be after having taught for a few years or when would they do it?

Virginia Isaac: Our staff—we have about 80 of them around the country—most of them have been in business or industry, have been a lawyer or something, and then had that sense of vocation. It is very much like a teacher getting a PGCE. That is that top half, but there are also other qualifications and I am conscious that you will know more about this than I do. OCR and Pearson will also be able to deliver certainly level 4 and some level 6. There are degree courses, but particularly there is that postgraduate course as well that tops up—

Q91 Stephen Timms: To sum up, it sounds as if you are saying that we should not be worried about the closure of these courses because new ones are coming?

Virginia Isaac: It is unfortunate and I think it reflects that uncertainty in the market that universities are losing confidence, but it does seem that others are coming in and the renewed interest is helping them.

Q92 Stephen Timms: Thank you. Adam?

Adam Powell: I do not want to at all diminish the role of the careers adviser or the careers counsellor in what Paul was just saying. I do not, however, want to lose sight of the impact that non-qualified professionals can make in influencing young people's career decisions. A 10-minute presentation from an apprentice who was in that school, sat in that chair, listened to that assembly, can be as powerful an intervention as the holy grail, consistent, theory-based careers education. Different interventions from business volunteers or in raising aspirations or raising attainment or just—there are some examples from our charity based in Bristol called Ablaze who bring in legal professionals who sit with young children and read with them because that child might not have a supportive family setting or they may not be getting professional input that some more advantaged young people have within their home setting. The role that non-qualified professionals can play—and I recognise this is not careers guidance but simply information and advice—I think can be a really powerful tool in terms of supporting young people into professions.

Katharine Horler: Just to follow up on that, nobody would disagree that there is not a need for young people to be surrounded by lots of different people who have a range of different skills and experiences that help them make career decisions, but you were asking

particularly about professional qualifications. I just wanted to come back on the university thing. For example, in our area we used to have a postgraduate course in Reading University. It closed about eight years ago. That has meant that for us there is no supply chain coming through from university, so I can't remember when we last had somebody come to us straight off a postgraduate course. Most of the staff we get are people who have a degree and an interest in this area and then we have to pay to get them trained up to level 6. I would say that is the norm for more of the careers guidance companies that work in schools. A lot of the university people end up going into universities to do careers guidance in universities, the sort of role Adam had before.

Q93 Stephen Timms: Do you agree with Virginia that most of the people coming through are people who have worked in something different for years and then decided—

Katharine Horler: Really varied, hugely varied. Some of them have done work with young people; some of them might be youth workers; some of them have done voluntary work; some of them will come from business. We have a huge range of staff with all sorts of different experiences and that is great for the young people.

Q94 Neil Carmichael: I want to talk about some of the national organisations, particularly to you, Adam. You state that there are three Government Departments that are involved and, if that is not complicated enough, we have four different national bodies. How effectively do they co-operate with each other and how effectively do they alternate between the two?

Adam Powell: It is a mixed picture. If we start with, say, the difference between the approach from BIS and DfE in terms of policy direction, there is a cut-off of 16 or 16 to 18 in terms of provision where it is not particularly helpful if you are looking at the benefit to the learner, to the young person. It is as if this policy kicks in when someone is having their 16th birthday and that is going to take them in a different direction. We do applaud the collaborative working that has been taking place between BIS and DfE, and moving down to funding agency level the shared executive of SFA and EFA I think has helped provide that oversight to help join up those areas together.

One of the challenges is where DWP may announce a new initiative around replacing advisory within schools and at the point of that intervention taking place it is not clear how that is dovetailing with National Careers Service provision, with National Apprenticeship Service contracting locally. Going back to the earlier point about multiple people knocking on doors, sometimes those initiatives can be as guilty of that.

Where I think it works well is at a local level, local regional directors and local managers working well together, having a good understanding of their local area and what the local priorities are from local authorities. It really does help target interventions and ensure that to the best of their abilities they are using those initiatives to work collaboratively. The LEP has brought those individuals together, they may have done so in any case, but the more we can do to connect those delivering on the ground to local education partners, local businesses, then the more joined up the end point delivery is.

Q95 Neil Carmichael: Katharine, you identified a fourth department in this story because you say in your submission that there are, in fact, four different Government Departments and you think that is, not surprisingly, wasteful and inefficient.

Katharine Horler: Yes. We have found two more now.

Q96 Neil Carmichael: Oh, right. I assume you think that that process or that arrangement should be simplified?

Katharine Horler: Yes.

Q97 Neil Carmichael: How would you set about doing that?

Katharine Horler: Okay, just to list the six for you, it is DfE, BIS, DWP, Ministry of Justice, the Cabinet Office and DCLG. It is those six that have some involvement in this careers field. I think your second question was about how to simplify it?

Neil Carmichael: Yes, because that is complicated and the Cabinet Office seems to be all over the place.

Katharine Horler: First, strategically, what we have said in Careers England in the position paper that we produced after the election was that we do not think you need any new money for careers. What you need to do is to put it all together because it is scattering off in six different directions. If you pooled all that money together and you had a coherent strategy that went across the piece and covered all those agendas, that would make a huge difference. If you like, that is at the strategic level.

I think what you have at the user level is what Adam described, a trail of people turning up on schools' front doorsteps, banging on the door and offering them practically the same service. For example, in the National Careers Service contract we have to do the inspiration agenda, which is about working with schools to help inspire and motivate young people. That is exactly the same agenda as the Careers and Enterprise Company, careers co-ordinators, enterprise co-ordinators and enterprise advisers. Then you have the DWP and the work they are doing in schools, so that is three lots doing exactly the same thing. That has to be a waste of money, so if we could pull it together and spread it out so that each school had one person to deal with, you are more likely to make an impact on schools, you are less likely to waste money, and what a fantastic message to give to Government to say, "We do not need any new money, we just need to spend what is already there more sensibly".

Q98 Neil Carmichael: Well, the Chancellor will certainly be pleased to hear that. We have just been to a school that Iain knows and what was obvious there was that there was more than one person involved in careers. It was clearly a cultural part of school life. The head teacher, the head of the sixth form for art, for example, various different people around the table, all basically saying, "Our interest here is to make sure our young people are guided in the right way". They went on to talk about the impact of league tables vis-à-vis A-level choices and asserted, I think rightly, that some children should be discouraged from A-levels if that was not the right pathway for them and pushed into some other area with careers

advice; for example, apprenticeships and so on. It was a whole-school operation. That is something we would say might be good to replicate. Would you agree?

Katharine Horler: Yes, that is fantastic. When you can see schools bringing together that diversity and different approaches within the school, that is what we are talking about when we are saying that good careers guidance is not any one person doing a good job. It is that collaborative effort coming together that makes a really big impact on the young people in that institution. Absolutely, that sounds like a fantastic example. What I am talking about is external factors on the school because if that school then has three different parties coming along offering exactly the same thing, what they want is one person to offer them really good service.

Q99 Neil Carmichael: The roles of the Department for Education and BIS are obviously central to this. That is why we are having this joint inquiry because both of our Committees are concerned about productivity and the whole issue about whether or not we are making the best use of the people we have, equipping them with the right skills, et cetera. There is a clear sense that we do need to see more holistic policymaking. I think Adam and yourself would certainly suggest that that would be better if there were, say, fewer departments with a more focused view. Is that correct, Adam?

Adam Powell: Yes. I should probably caveat that my own learnings of late have been informed by discussions I have been having with local authority partners around devolution and around a city region presenting a co-ordinated, joined-up approach for employability and skills right the way from young people and those furthest away from the labour market through to higher-level skills and university graduates. What was then tabled was a polite request that we try to tailor a message for individual Government Department negotiations, which we—I say we; local authorities in West of England—have done, but it is undoing the joint approach and the joined-up local delivery of a successful service.

Virginia Isaac: I think the good news is that there are six departments that are looking into this and taking it seriously, but we need to have a national joined-up strategy that then is put out to the country and delivered locally. There will undoubtedly be different models and I think the LEP model as brokers would be very interesting. Just to make sure that Adam does not have the wrong end of the stick, we are not saying no employers, we are saying it needs both employers and career professionals.

On top of that also, one has to embed this. It is a hearts and minds thing; it is not just money. Money helps sometimes get hearts and minds. You have to embed it in the schools so that they all feel that this is a very important part of education. Not that you expect the subject teachers to be careers advisers, but at least for them to understand where their subject might lead and also to be able to advise then and support employers coming in.

At the moment, it feels, glad as we are and hugely welcoming this Committee, that there is a tendency for slightly ad hoc random visits by employers. When I talk to employers, they are desperate for a school strategy, otherwise you have multiple employers knocking on the doors of multiple schools. You have to create that seedbed within the school so that the seeds that then come in from different employers can take root. I do not think it is proverbial rocket science to get that right.

Q100 Neil Carmichael: Following on from that, what sort of role do you think the Careers and Enterprise Company should be taking and how do you think that should be developed?

Virginia Isaac: I will start. Again, we very much welcome it, but at the moment I think the emphasis is on the “enterprise”. We are very, very much hoping that that will be balanced out by the emphasis on “careers”. I think the LEPs do have a very interesting role to play in order to try to broker that and work with the National Careers Service and prime contractors as well.

Q101 Neil Carmichael: Adam, is that your thought?

Adam Powell: Yes, we welcome it. We were one of the first phase LEPs to host a careers and enterprise co-ordinator locally. What we have been able to do with that, using some solid data, is to prioritise our schools because with first come, first served, the schools that understand employability and employer engagement will be first to the door. We have sought to ensure that the schools that are least engaged with employers, plus they have the greatest challenges in terms of proportion of students on free school meals or with attainment or Ofsted ratings, are at the front of the queue and can receive some targeted support. It is helping our continued emphasis of trying to join things up locally. We have about 25 local and national providers of business and school partnership creators, and if we can help schools understand those local links to business volunteers I think that is a very welcome programme.

Virginia Isaac: A very quick comment. BIS thinking is that there is a whole constituency that has not been raised, I think, in these panel discussions, which is the universities and their Widening Participation monies, £75 million. If that could also be used to help support careers advice and guidance in schools that could be enormously helpful in terms of, first, contributing to social mobility and helping in widening participation; but, secondly, helping to save some of that huge waste when young people drop out of university. That is wasted money. That joining up between BIS and DfE will be wonderful.

Q102 Neil Carmichael: Sounds good. Paul, one of the six Government Departments is DWP, responsible for Jobcentre Plus. You are not that happy with that organisation being involved in supporting careers guidance. Why not?

Paul Warner: It does seem to be rather odd that for some young people, perhaps in very disadvantaged areas of the country, perhaps their first experience of careers guidance comes from the same organisation that is primarily responsible for giving out benefits. That does not appear to me to be a particularly good opening gambit to getting into the world of work. It is not saying anything against the particular individuals within JCP. There are some very good careers advisers within JCP, but it is less to do with JCP and DWP within itself; it is more to do with this proliferation of various Government Departments getting involved in things to do with careers guidance all of a sudden. We have the National Careers Service, for example. We then, almost out of leftfield, get the Careers and Enterprise Company. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with what the Careers and Enterprise Company is doing, but why is it there? Why did that suddenly appear? Wouldn't it have been better to not risk some overlap of duties between NCS and

CAEC and build an all-age careers service using the basis of the National Careers Service, which is something that people will easily recognise?

Then, on top of that, you now have DWP “piling in” and saying, “We are going to send loads of advisers into school as well”. Already you now have, just as an example, a school saying, “I have CAEC, I have NCS, I have DWP all knocking on my door. That is in addition to NotGoingToUni.co.uk and Plotr.co.uk and all these. Which one of these do I look at? Where do I go? How do I devise a strategy from this when I don’t have within my team qualified, trained careers advisers who can make a judgment about what is worth taking forward?” It is not so much the individual items, it is the proliferation and the interaction between them.

Q103 Michelle Donelan: We are all aware there are skill gaps that we have in the UK in a variety of different sectors. If we take it as a fact that one of the purposes of education is to feed the workforce and feed the economy, with that in mind what role do you think that labour market intelligence should have in providing careers advice and also guidance?

Paul Warner: Shall I start? It is important but it is one factor among many. We have heard before about the triangulation effect, that there a number of different factors involved. We have heard already about a number of different parties and players within this, from parents and young people themselves, from local industry, from industry abroad, from industry elsewhere in the country, a lot of different factors to take into account. It is incredibly important that there is good local labour market information. Even a fairly quick search, for example, just through Google, through some LEP sites, will show that there is some easily attainable local labour market information that gives you some good guidance about what the local labour market looks like.

What I think some local labour market info needs to work on is to make that easily understandable for people who are outside of the sector or who are not involved in the economy to understand what that means and how that will affect the sorts of decisions or advice they might give their children or their pupils or whoever it is. Yes, it is incredibly important. We do need to know what the market wants and there is some very good information out there.

Q104 Michelle Donelan: Do you think it is the LEPs’ role to provide it and to make it digestible and understandable then?

Paul Warner: I think it is a very good place to start. The LEP system, given its robustness and its integrity, seems to be increasingly a place where providers and everybody alike will think that could be a good place to go to, that would be a good place to start. There certainly is some very good information about it already.

Adam Powell: From a LEP perspective, we love to work with intelligence. I do not know if it is safe to admit that, but looking at data and forecasting three, five, 15 years ahead can provide a solid evidence base to make some important strategic decisions. Whether that is taking a sector-based approach, which we do as many LEPs looking at the needs of local sectors, we do that through drawing on national evidence available through Sector Skills Council, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and others, but equally ensure that the voice of our local employers is heard through an annual skills survey. It is

important to note that very often SMEs find it difficult to forecast their future needs beyond two or three years, so it is important to draw on that national intelligence and then try to provide that local flavour to it.

What LEPs can bring through the joint partnership working between the public and private sector is understanding the local economy in spatial terms and future planning areas. Enterprise zone and enterprise areas give a very good steer as to where they are seeing significant employment growth. We are able to look at data in terms of job growth but also replacement jobs. There will be some sectors where, due to technological advances, there may be no new jobs in that area but certainly replacement jobs are going to be significant and with a move to the requirement of a higher-level skilled workforce can inform future planning.

Our LMI, as Paul said, we have tried to bring it to life for different audiences. We have some LMI packs for careers and employment professionals that look at salaries, job types and local provision. We also then launched last year a skills prospectus that brings together all of our college and training provider provision to look at where employment training exists within sectors to try to inform local people as to where the opportunities are across the region. In terms of trying to raise aspiration, letting local people know where local employment opportunities are is key, even just sharing facts such as the most frequent vacancies advertised online in our region are in tech and software engineering to help people understand that there are key growth sectors that are going to be growing in the future.

Q105 Michelle Donelan: Do you think they are currently understandable enough? Do you think that they are accessible enough and that they can be interpreted easily or do you think there is still work to be done on them?

Adam Powell: I think that can be the difference between labour market information and labour market intelligence where the information is simply presenting the data and intelligence is bringing it to life. If that is not right for the right audience—we have had many requests for some of the infographics that we have produced that we publish in local media that are really easy to understand. If that is the incentive that one person needs to find out more, then I think the local partners have done their jobs.

Q106 Michelle Donelan: Okay, but there is more work to be done?

Adam Powell: There is more work to be done.

Paul Warner: Can I just come back? I am not coming back on anything that Adam has said, it is just a small caveat that in terms of the role of labour market intelligence and labour market information it is very important but it is one factor among many. There is the slight danger that if you end up with a careers system that is too reliant on local labour market information, what you end up with is an inert economy because all you will ever be doing is producing more of the same of everything that you have ever produced before. There are difficulties and dangers sometimes in trying to predict too far ahead. There are jobs that are going to be around in 10 years that we have not even thought of. We must not let labour market information perhaps—one of my PC terms—break the spirit of creativity among people who are thinking what else they can go for.

Q107 Michelle Donelan: Yes, especially with the time lag as well. Can I just ask one more thing? Do you have any statistics on how many people and how many bodies actually use them, though? It is all well and good producing all these packs and so on, and it all being brilliant, but if they are not used? Do you have any—

Adam Powell: The key audience that we have been speaking to, in fact, are really seeking to influence the influencers. Rather than trying to reach our local population of 1.1 million people in the Bath and Bristol area, we can inform careers professionals who are then seeing multiple individuals. We know that in the last 18 months we have supported 300 local careers and employment professionals, which could be a careers adviser, it could be a teacher with a responsibility for careers in schools or it could be from an independent provider. If we can help them understand what the local employment strategy is, where the growth in jobs is likely to take place and the kinds of skills that might be sought in the region going forward—I completely take your point, Paul, it is not the be all and end all and we will often have very difficult discussions saying it is not all just about the LEP's growth sectors, it is absolutely not just about that, because there are mass employment sectors in retail and tourism and that is part of the picture as well. We can probably do more in terms of measuring our impact and trying to understand that reach, but the continued positive feedback we have from multiple users about the data is reassuring us that we should keep doing it and doing more.

Michelle Donelan: Katharine, you wanted to come in.

Katharine Horler: Yes, it was just two reflections really on the whole LMI area. I think LEPs have played a really important role and upped the game on the use of LMI. One of the things we find is that there are some quite significant skills gaps in our area that are coming through. I suppose one challenge I have had is about the speed of response from a provider side, so where the LEP is identifying gaps in skills, how quickly collectively can we make sure that there is a course put in place that addresses that need or new training providers and new apprenticeships introduced that tackle that need? That is one reflection.

The other one is to do with engagement of employers. What we have seen is a bit of a shift in employers getting engaged in the whole careers area, from it being a good thing and doing it from a sort of philanthropic side, to being business-driven, particularly employers in areas where there are significant skills gaps deliberately targeting schools and going into schools and working with young people. They offer some fantastic opportunities to young people.

The only caution I would add is what about the whole mobility thing, because what we find is employers will sometimes say, “I want to go into that school because I know that from that school I will get the kind of people I want to employ in the future” and they will pick and choose a bit more about which school they go into, rather than maybe a school where it might be hugely aspirational for some of those young people to go into that employment field and it might be, from a social mobility perspective, a good thing.

Virginia Isaac: A couple of observations, if I may. I think it is recognised that the sort of traditional careers advice, where you are matching with jobs, is now not something that is as appropriate as in the past, given all the changes in the job market. Yes, it is a cliché that we are preparing young people for jobs that do not exist yet, but a lot of young people do not go straight into jobs. So LMI, really important, it needs to be there, certainly for the

adult market, and LMI for All, which is an open data source, means that anybody can link into it, so that is great. But the observation I would like to make is that it seems more and more important that we are starting careers guidance, careers education with younger students, not just year 10 or 11. Then, yes, they might want to know what a policeman does or what a doctor does, but they do not need to know whether there are vacancies then.

Another thing that I just would like to bring into this is the importance of the whole non-cognitive skills, talking about hard skills, but more and more employers will say it is not so much what they studied. Skills can be taught, but it is things like communication skills or commercial awareness or team-working. Those sorts of things should be and can be brought into the school curriculum at a far earlier stage.

Q108 Neil Carmichael: According to Engineering UK, and indeed the Institute of Chemical Engineers, we need an extra 89,000 to 90,000 engineers each and every year. Where does that information fit into careers advice in the context of encouraging young people to think about taking the steps to become an engineer, if that was appropriate, or feeding it into LMI, as we have just been discussing? Because that is a big figure and it is a significant problem to our economy, so where does it fit in?

Virginia Isaac: I thought that Aspire's research that you heard about a week or so ago was very important in terms of if young people have not started to think about engineering and science as a viable career before they get to secondary school, there is a real danger of losing them, particularly girls and particularly those from lower socioeconomic groups. It is not something that can be fixed overnight; we have to plug it in at a much earlier age.

Katharine Horler: It is a very similar point, and I think it reflects on the school that you went to visit earlier, because if you are going to deal with that, there has to be a whole school approach to it. How do you make science more interesting and exciting, particularly from a young age? How are you helping young people see some of those opportunities and definitely putting it back into junior schools and looking at the junior school phase and how engineering is an exciting area to get into.

Q109 Stephen Timms: Just a very quick point to Virginia: given the multiplicity of sources of LMI, what is the importance of the LMI?

Virginia Isaac: Largely because it is open source and it is free, so all of us who have other websites and are dealing with a whole multitude of young people are able to link into it and therefore demonstrate that information and have that information available, so it is ubiquitous in that respect, which is very helpful.

Q110 Stephen Timms: Would it be a big loss if it went?

Virginia Isaac: I think it would be, because it has been produced under very good, rigorous conditions, it is well-managed. I do not have any self-interest in it, but it is something that is available. Let's not reinvent things if they are working.

Chair: Thank you. I am just going to move on, if I may, because I am conscious of time.

Q111 Paul Blomfield: As you said earlier, Chair, I wanted to come in on apprenticeships, but I wonder if I can just first clarify a point Virginia made earlier. I was not exactly clear how you saw universities widening participation, in relation to assistance with fees through the Student Opportunity Allocation, which is about recruitment and retention to university.

Virginia Isaac: Apologies, because this is a personal view rather than a CDI view, but at Aspiring Futures, where we do not get any Government money, it is a social enterprise, so it relies on trade and services—and others do as well—we have to say, “Who is going to pay? The Government cannot pay; parents cannot pay; schools cannot pay. Where is their money for careers advice?” Now, employers are obviously a source, because it is in the interests of employers to be able to ensure that they are getting the skills, potential workers coming through. But the other is universities.

I had a meeting just the other day with the director of Offer, and they are spending large amounts of money on trying to encourage young people to go to university. It is much better if that is done by professional, impartial people. That might mean that there are fewer people dropping out of university, so that applies to participation across the board, but particularly in colleges, where perhaps they are applying—this goes back to my UCAS days as well—and not getting on to the right course. That is very significant, that is not good for the individual, it is not good for society and it is certainly not good for the economy. So is there some imaginative joining-up that could be helping universities to use this money in a way that is more effective?

Q112 Paul Blomfield: That is certainly a very valid point in terms of the number of young people that go to university and then—as the Higher Education Council research of last year—feeling that, 12 months later, they made a wrong choice of course.

Virginia Isaac: The university then loses the money as well, because you cannot get that student back, so they will lose the fees.

Q113 Paul Blomfield: Is there something coming out of your discussions about that?

Virginia Isaac: I am hoping so.

Q114 Paul Blomfield: Okay. If I can come back to the area that I wanted to ask about, which is apprenticeships, Katharine, Paul made the point earlier that schools often actively discourage—and that is certainly what many of us have heard—talking to young people, who have struggled to find information about apprenticeships. You have said in your evidence that schools see that as a threat to sixth form numbers. How can we make sure that schools do provide impartial information on all the options?

Katharine Horler: I think the new law is to be welcomed. That means that schools will have to ensure that young people know about that. I suppose my question would be how is it going to be enforced? It is all very well having a law, but how are they going to know whether schools do or don't do it? I suppose also it is about the scale of the task. At the moment, only about 6% of young people go into apprenticeships, so that is a huge number, that we need to get more young people looking at apprenticeships than have done in the past. That is a big challenge for all of us and it is about how you engage schools in that challenge. I would not want you to think that there are lots of schools behaving badly,

because there aren't, there are lots of schools who are fantastic and who share all of the options about post-16 opportunities with their young people and they are confident. A confident school is not afraid of young people knowing about all the options, because they know that young people make the right choice, and if they choose to stay in their sixth form, they have chosen for the right reason.

But we have evidence of schools where, for example, young people are encouraged to stay on a level 1 vocational course in the school, which is completely inappropriate for them. One of them was football coaching. They are encouraged to stay in school to do a vocational course rather than go on a really good apprenticeship just because it increases numbers in the sixth form. I think that is disappointing, because we have heard in the previous bit about LMI about skills gaps and about the struggles that some employers have to fill good vacancies and good apprenticeship opportunities. We need to make sure that we are encouraging somehow young people to be able to look at those options and take those up, rather than being on an inappropriate course in school for no good reason.

Q115 Paul Blomfield: Schools presumably do that because they are opting to and the way that they view the measures and sort of incentives that have been built into the system. Is there anything else that needs to be done to tackle that?

Katharine Horler: I suppose the other side is that unhappy people in the sixth form are not likely to stay put in the sixth form, so it is about encouraging them to look at people going into the sixth form for the right reasons, because what they do not want to be measured on is the number of drop-outs and that obviously you are going to get more drop-outs if people are not in the right place. I do not know how you can incentivise them to promote the apprenticeship angle, other than that is a good thing, that lots of young people are now getting into fantastic careers via the apprenticeship route, careers that end up being equal to a graduate level opportunity; they have just gone a different route. For a lot of young people that is attractive. We find not going to uni, lots of schools promoting alternatives to university. That is an encouraging thing and maybe it is about sharing good practice of some of what good schools do to encourage young people to look at all the options, including apprenticeships.

Q116 Paul Blomfield: One of the things that the Government is trying to do is to require schools to involve apprenticeship providers in careers advice. Paul, how do you think that is going to work in practice?

Paul Warner: It just so depends on the nature of the school. As we said before, there is some very good practice within schools. Generally speaking, there is some good careers practice going on in schools, but it is hidden away. That is sometimes because the school does not realise that what they are doing is good, because they do not have anything else to measure it by, so you never get to bring that out. That is one point to bear in mind, but it does depend on the nature of the school. Unfortunately, we more or less every day get some company on e-mail or by phone to me saying, "We have been trying to get into local schools and they are just not interested. They are not letting us get access to the parents, they are not giving access to meet all the pupils that are there. We have been allowed into a careers fair, but we were outside the main hall, we were in the corridor out the back". This is an attitudinal thing with a lot of schools and I think it is not an easy one to crack.

We said right at the beginning there is quite a lot of missing strategy in this as well. It can come down to something as simple as, for example, the confusion or the deliberate misinformation that there is sometimes, unfortunately, about the raising of participation. It is raising of participation, which is not raising of school leaving age. Unfortunately it is, in some schools, almost sold as, “You are here until you are 18” and then there is nothing done to dissuade the illusion that people have that, “I have to stay until I am 18 then”. It is not helped by a strategic conundrum sometimes where you have existing sixth formers in an area and then suddenly a new academy opens up, irrespective of the facts, which just gives this impression that sixth form, that is the way to go and the academic route is the way to follow. It reinforces the suppression and there is a lack of strategy, there is a lack of cogency and coherence about what is going on. Some schools just do not do their bit to try to counter that and others are just confused about what they should be doing.

Q117 Paul Blomfield: You said it is not an easy one to crack and that is absolutely right, it is one of the reasons we keep coming back to the issue, but the Government have set ambitious targets for apprenticeships, so from any point of view, we need to be able to crack it. Do you have any thoughts on any things that can be done to help? Sorry, Virginia wants to come in.

Virginia Isaac: I do not like to use the word “rebranding” because that conjures up vast amounts of money, but I think there needs to be an element of rebranding. Just saying, “We need 3 million apprentices by 2020” and apprentice providers going in I do not think will have an impact. Talking about technical professional education I think is important and there is far more now of a trend towards it is not either knowing or doing, it is not either theoretical or vocational, it is both. When you think of the most high-value careers, of doctors and vets and dentists, these are all vocational careers, so we have somehow got to get into people’s heads that this is not an also-ran if you cannot go to university. There are interesting signs now of high-flying students, the three A students—when I was at UCAS, so long as you got three As, you could find a place at university—doing a cost benefit analysis of going straight to university or going for a higher apprenticeship or responsive degree. If we could almost rebrand all those as technical, vocational, education apprenticeships and make them far more appealing, I think a big communications campaign we would start to see that cultural shift, but it is very embedded, that the academic route is always the best one.

Adam Powell: I think the apprenticeship levy probably is to be welcomed. I think apprenticeships will now be in the boardroom. The desire is that companies will be embedding apprenticeships within their workforce development and growth plans. There is a significant amount of uncertainty and unknowns around the levy at the moment. I am speaking to two London local business leaders on Thursday night, first of all to ask the question, “Who has heard of it?” and then secondly, “What are you going to do about it?” There is a concern that if you are not in the disputed 2% of businesses who fall within the scope of the levy, then there would be a notion of being let off the hook and actually we want 98% of businesses to be as involved as those who are paid the levy. So there are a lot of questions around the levy. There are multiple partners that need to take part in this in terms of employers understanding the benefit of the apprentice levy.

We have heard lots about the learner understanding the opportunities that are here. I think overarching the apprenticeship forum around improving the quality of apprenticeships as

well. I think if we just look at the 3 million target, which we know for our city region means 3,000 apprenticeships starts, if just look at measuring starts and not quality and success, then there is going to be little impact on the local economy. Particularly also around levels, we know that two-thirds of our provision locally are at level 2, and yet the need of the labour market going forward is looking at a higher level, so how do we incentivise apprentices, particularly young people, to embark on level 3 and level 4 to meet those needs? I think it is encouraging that colleges and providers are wanting to make a difference in this area. Our universities are equally involved in the development of degree apprenticeships locally, so there is a lot to do. The key concern for us is the significant decline in the skills funding agency support. Our local area has seen around—or will be seeing—an 80% to 85% reduction in staff on the ground and the referral to national support, national phone lines, understandably they lack the local knowledge as to what can be achieved locally. So LEPs I think are kind of stepping into the frame because I am not sure anyone else at the moment.

Q118 Paul Blomfield: Can I press you on that? In your priorities for the year in your LEP, you talk about working in business and education perhaps to deliver an effective apprenticeship strategy. What is happening in practice and what can we learn from that in terms of what LEPs can do to help?

Adam Powell: I think the Government late last year had published the “Apprenticeship Vision 2020” and I think taking that as a steer, it will be a helpful framework for local strategies around it. We ourselves have an ambition working towards 2020, and it is about recognising those key stakeholders, so how do we influence the influencers in terms of reaching careers advisers, parents and others, to improve the throughput of apprentices. I have mentioned the employer support. I think I have probably answered your question in my previous comment. In terms of an effective strategy, somehow being measurable, so we know about our numbers.

We welcome the data that the Government have produced around apprenticeship starts by constituency. We have stopped short of obviously a league table, because we are not sure that that would be particularly helpful, but engaging our local MPs in understanding apprenticeship starts within their areas is interesting and there is universal support for improving opportunities for local residents. I think, importantly, just the employers being a part of the strategy, because the apprenticeship performance will shift funding and shift the focus to employers and if they do not get to understand it, then the system potentially may fail.

Q119 Paul Blomfield: Just one final question then from me. Virginia, you talked about all careers professionals being given up-to-date information about apprenticeships. Whose job is it to provide that?

Virginia Isaac: One hopes the National Apprenticeship Service picks stuff up. I do not know. For careers professionals—and this is one reason why it is difficult for school-based staff to do everything, because there is so much to know—keeping people updated and informed as to all the different routes is very, very important.

Paul Warner: I think where we want it to be is self-perpetuating, like a perpetual motion machine. I am not sure there is any one body that it must be their responsibility to make

sure everybody has all of the information that is possible. It should be self-generating. That is where we want to get to, so the employers understand there are benefits from it and young people understand there are options that could be open and then it begins to come together as it is certainly meant to.

Just one particular point I just wanted to make, when you talked about the 3 million target just now, I think it is very unlikely the 3 million target is going to be met just by concentrating on school leavers. We have to understand that a good deal of the apprenticeships are going to come from the existing workforce and new roles within the existing workforce, which brings us on to the importance of adult careers guidance, which we have touched on, but have not explored here perhaps as much as we have about careers guidance for young people. That must be important.

Chair: That sounds like another inquiry. My colleagues and I thank you for your time on behalf of the Committee and we found that valuable. Could I also just finish how we started, by thanking Westminster Kingsway College for your hospitality, very, very grateful for the whole time that you have spent with us this afternoon and providing these fantastic facilities to undertake this Select Committee inquiry. Thanks again, it has been invaluable.