

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills](#), HC 170

Wednesday 29 Jun 2016

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

Questions 1-97

Witness

[I](#): Amanda Spielman, the Government's preferred candidate for the post of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, and welcome to this session, Amanda. It's good to see you here. We are going to be asking a few questions to see how you understand the role and then we will be issuing a report and judging your position and suitability.

Why do you want to be Her Majesty's chief inspector?

Amanda Spielman: Why? It is a bit of a "mountain" answer: because it's there. It is something that is incredibly important in the system and that cannot be approached simplistically. It is not a routine thing that you simply have to point in a certain direction and off it goes. It needs understanding of education; understanding of large and complex systems and how they evolve and need to be steered over time; understanding of Government and the pressures on Government; and understanding a big and complex profession. It brings it all together in a very exciting way. It is a challenge that I couldn't resist.

Chair: Have you done any mountaineering?

Amanda Spielman: Walking, I would say, rather than mountaineering.

Q2 **Chair:** In a couple of sentences, what are the qualities you will bring to the role?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Amanda Spielman: First of all, a really strong interest in evidence, grounding, making sure that the inspection system genuinely looks at what is there, doesn't overstretch itself or overreach itself and does exactly what it says on the tin it is meant to do.

Secondly, really building system feedback and making sure that Ofsted continues to listen to, be responsive to and make sure that its processes develop in a way that is in the interests of the system as a whole. It is a difficult balance that it has to strike, because every report has to be completely honest and objective, for good or ill, and yet Ofsted also has to add up to a force for system improvement—there is no point having it unless the cumulative total effect is positive. That is the sort of strategic balance it always has to strike.

Q3 **Chair:** Ofsted is a big organisation, larger than Ofqual. The position of chief inspector is one which attracts attention and has a significant profile. That is the first issue. The second one is that it is a big organisation to run. First of all, do you think that you would be happy in such a high-profile role? What would you be able to bring to the table to support that overall role?

Amanda Spielman: Would I be happy? Yes. I have been tested to a considerable extent in the Ofqual role over the last five years. Being chairman is less high profile than being chief executive; nevertheless, it is an organisation that has been under considerable pressure. There have been ups and downs and criticism, and that has given me a lot of exposure to what it is like in the kind of organisation where the upside is system respect and the downside is widespread dislike. Working through that and coping with that—I think I have the resilience and qualities to do that. I think some of the personality tests that I was put through as part of the application process were designed to see if I had that kind of resilience.

That was the first part of your question; the second part was around the skills to do it. I think the principles of management are pretty similar in all organisations. You have to make sure you have a workable model and a working team and that you understand who you can rely on for what, and make sure that you build systems that improve, not systems that destroy. Ofsted has a very strategic role in the system. I have a very strong understanding of corporate strategy and thinking about organisational development in a big system. I know a lot from Ofqual about how the decisions that are taken by an organisation like this can have repercussions through the system, so the way you need to collect feedback and use evidence and so on to make sure that what you are doing is not in a bubble but is something that is genuinely likely to help the systems—all the systems, not just schools, but children's services and everywhere else that Ofsted works.

Q4 **Chair:** What experience can you point to that you have had that would help you run such a large organisation?



Amanda Spielman: Before I came into education 15 years ago, I was strategy director at AT&T Capital, which at that point was, I think, the third largest commercial finance company in the US—I can't quite remember the numbers but it had many, many billions and was a very big, distributed organisation with many offices. To some extent there is the experience from ARK Schools, building a multi-site organisation. That is different from Ofsted; nevertheless, a school is a separate unit with a great deal of self-contained activity, and Ofsted has eight regional offices and a great network of inspectors who are part-time. So it is thinking about the levers and structures and making sure that you really understand the strategic drivers and are tracking the right things and seeing where any gaps are opening up.

Q5 **Ian Austin:** This isn't really the chief executive role, though, is it? You would be the chief inspector. Your predecessor had been a hugely successful head teacher, with a track record of school improvement that was second to none. When I asked him whether he felt well prepared to become the chief inspector, his exact quote was "pretty ill-prepared". Can you tell us what direct experience you have got of school improvement?

Amanda Spielman: My direct experience of school improvement comes mainly from my time at ARK Schools. Before I went to Ofsted, I was part of the senior team there for seven years. I haven't got my bicycle today but I was bicycling around London spending time in a lot of schools, looking at whether we should take them on, and where we took them on, working out what the problems were, what help was needed, finding the people and thinking about the group-level systems that were needed to provide the support to improve and to ensure that performance was sustained and that we built a self-improving system where the centre reinforced the schools, the schools reinforced the centre and the schools reinforced each other. So I spent seven years looking at schools directly, working with schools and working on systems to ensure that improvement lasted.

Chair: Catherine, would you like to pursue the line of personal independence?

Q6 **Catherine McKinnell:** We all know that Sir Michael Wilshaw could be very robust in challenging Government policy. To what extent do you believe that is part of your role as Ofsted chief inspector?

Amanda Spielman: It is very much part of the role. Ofsted has a very clear mandate to be independent, as does Ofqual. I think Ofqual is seen to have used independence judiciously but very clearly when necessary. I can draw on two outstanding examples today.

One was that we gave clear advice to the then Education Secretary about the English baccalaureate certificates. At the time, the proposal was to do a contract model for a single provider at the same time as doing qualification reform. We wrote to the Minister advising him that doing both simultaneously would impose too great a risk on the system. He listened

to that advice and decided to pursue qualification reform but not industry reform at that point.

Another example is the decision that we took to delay most of the new GCSEs by a year. There was a ministerial request to have all the new GCSEs for first teaching in 2015. We decided that that was not deliverable; only English and maths should be done to that timetable, and others should be deferred.

More generally, I have thought a lot over the past few years about what an independent inspector or regulator needs to think about and get right in order for independence really to work in practice. I think there are several things.

One is that there needs to be clear agreement about the inspector's remit and its interpretation. The statutory words are always there but there does need to be a shared understanding of what it is at any given time.

An inspector has to work on evidence. It is not a job where you simply throw opinions around; it is a job where you really look at your evidence base, analyse it, think about what needs to be said at any given time. So you have a clear message, but it is very well grounded in your own work.

Of course, good communications matter. Nobody likes nasty surprises. The inspectorate should not be throwing surprises at anybody in the system. It should be a steady accumulation of work that builds ineluctably to clear conclusions. If you get that right then you have the kind of respect on the basis of which you can make difficult decisions or give advice that you know will not be particularly welcome but you can expect to have it listened to and respected.

Q7 Catherine McKinnell: In your response to Ian, you outlined your time at ARK as being your main engagement with the education system. Would you say, therefore, that you are more aligned to the Government's current approach to education in terms of the academisation process than perhaps the current chief inspector?

Amanda Spielman: To step back to your first point, I was asked about my direct involvement in schools. I have been entirely in the education system for the past 15 years. Because I was asked about my direct involvement I talked specifically about ARK Schools. Ofqual is a slightly different kind of involvement, although I have done a lot to make sure there are much stronger feedback loops from schools, colleges and all parts of the system that Ofqual deals with to improve that.

On alignment, a lot of my early time in education was in an academy chain. I don't think I have ever taken a dogmatic view that a particular model or school structure is the way to do things. I have talked in public on various occasions about the way ARK Schools was built but I don't think I have ever taken a view that there is a single right model. All manner of factors dictate what is effective in a given situation. It is Ofsted's job to look objectively, not in terms of a particular objective but to look at achievement in the system, and to report on what it finds.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q8 **Catherine McKinnell:** Did anyone from the Government approach you about the job or encourage you to apply for it?

Amanda Spielman: No. The first time I ever even thought of it was when there was an article in *The Sunday Times*, in about February this year I think, which reported on the possibility that the Government were looking to America for a chief inspector. There was a paragraph at the end that talked about candidates—I can't remember the phrase—or people understood to be being considered, and my name was one of them. A number of people asked me about that and I said it was absolute nonsense and that somebody was mixing up Ofqual and Ofsted; nobody had spoken to me about it and I was not thinking about it. A couple of people booted me a bit harder at that point and asked why I wasn't thinking about it. One said if I was a man I wouldn't have thought twice and that I would be thinking about it. That was when I started thinking. I heard nothing from anybody in Government. The first contact I had about it was a call from the headhunter when the job was advertised.

Q9 **Catherine McKinnell:** You have set out the scene quite well. You are the second senior figure from Ofqual to be appointed to a different regulator in recent months. Do you think there is an issue with there being quite a small pool of potential regulators?

Amanda Spielman: That is an interesting question. Certainly what I have seen in Ofqual over the last few years has become increasingly recognised as something interesting and strategically important: Ofqual has appointed a number of senior people who don't have a long regulatory background but who are finding it an incredibly interesting place to be. I would say I am quite optimistic about a pipeline of talent and I think that is very much what Ofsted builds on. Most people who come into Ofsted as inspectors and move into management come from a school background but find it really interesting. The quality of that pipeline will be of enormous interest and importance to me, so making it an interesting job, one that is rewarding and one that develops careers is incredibly important.

Q10 **Chair:** Following on from Catherine's question, you are familiar with the world of education, you have been in and out of the Department for various reason and you have obviously been chair of Ofqual, but of course Ofsted has to have a strong sense of independence from that world. It is an agency connected to the Department but is necessarily quite separate in terms of the way it should be run and led. Given your familiarity with the world of education and your involvement in other education activities, do you think you will find it easy to be so separate and to cut out a distinct identity?

Amanda Spielman: That is what we have been doing for the last five years. It has been very important to maintain the right distance. You have to have enough of a relationship that the tough things can be discussed but absolutely not be in anyone's pocket. We have maintained what I think is the proper distance and formality, especially in our dealings with Ministers and advisers, precisely so that we keep that independence and perspective. I think I have as good an understanding of that as pretty



much anybody around from that experience. You are right that it is something that really matters.

- Q11 **Michelle Donelan:** Following on from Catherine's comments, ARK is widely viewed as one of the best academy chains in the country; it is highly respected. Could it be that working there has not given you a complete cross-section of the education system—that it has given you a small pool of specific knowledge?

Amanda Spielman: You always have to be open to new knowledge, wherever it comes from. People generally think I'm particularly interested in soaking up new stuff. ARK has a whole range of schools, from very high performers to schools in the most difficult circumstances that have just arrived in the network. It has a skew towards disadvantage—it has far more schools that serve disadvantaged children—so I fully acknowledge that I have had less exposure to schools with very advantaged intakes and I need to make sure I get a full perspective. That is partly why, in my preliminary discussions with the senior team, the advantage of having several months of lead-in time is that I can do very thorough preparation.

I have been thinking about children's services, about early years and about doing as much inspection training, shadowing and preparation as I can, to make sure I have real insight into the issues in all parts of the system. I very much do not want to be coming in thinking that, because I have had exposure to this, I know it all. Again, one of the benefits of having done something like Ofqual for the last few years is that you become very aware of how much lies below the surface: nine tenths is largely invisible from public discussion and one tenth is the bit that you see at the top. I am very conscious that there will be an iceberg here, as everywhere else, and that my first few months have to be about really understanding the whole, making sure that I have the right perspective and using advice from inside and outside to get that.

- Q12 **Michelle Donelan:** So you recognise that there will be gaps and you are going to work on them straight away. Do you accept that the current chief inspector and the previous chair were also drawn from ARK schools? Do you think it is healthy to keep doing that? Is there a potential problem in the long term?

Amanda Spielman: First, it is not my decision, and clearly I have not been part of those decisions. Secondly, any good person immediately puts themselves entirely in the role they are in. I had to do that with ARK schools in 2012, for example, with GCSE English and the decision Ofqual took to sustain its position on those GCSEs. By that time, I knew that a number of ARK schools were adversely affected, but so be it. I could not let ARK's particular interest or how it was affected colour my decision—our decision, I should say—as a regulator.

- Q13 **William Wragg:** We talked about experience and whether it is direct or indirect. Ofsted has recently placed a greater emphasis on including serving practitioners in their inspection teams. Not to dwell on the point, but is it not therefore odd, given the remit of Ofsted, to have a chief



HOUSE OF COMMONS

inspector who has not had that front-line experience in the classroom, or indeed social care experience, which we have not discussed yet?

Amanda Spielman: I don't think so at all. First, as you have just pointed out, Ofsted is not just all about schools; there is a great deal else. I do not think there is anybody who has a deep experience of everything it covers. No matter what, there are going to be some gaps. It is about having the person who understands and makes sure that the management team as a whole works to do the job that matters.

Secondly, even in relation to schools, we have all seen the public discussion over the last few years and the move away from Ofsted being conceived as an organisation that exists to tell teachers how to do their job. We have been through a very clear transition away from telling teachers how to do their job. If that's what Ofsted was, maybe the national super-head model would be the right one, but I think there is very clear system agreement that that is not what is wanted. The job is to make sure that the whole inspection system has the right people coming into it, that inspections are strong and reliable, that data is used well in the system and that, overall, Ofsted adds up to a constructive force for system improvement in all the places it operates. It is not about being a super head.

Q14 **William Wragg:** None the less, the teaching profession seems to be expressing some concern and scepticism about your appointment as chief inspector. Given that, how do you intend to win them over?

Amanda Spielman: Taking a step back, there were a couple of union comments that were very negative; however the school associations, ASCL and NAHT, put out extremely positive comments. ASCL in particular, I thought, was strikingly positive and showed that they felt I very much deserved to be supported in this role. I think that is just as important. I also do not draw entirely on union reaction. I think unions have been opposed in principle to the existence of a chief inspector and I think their comment around every proposed chief inspector, certainly in the last decade, has always been negative. I look as well at social media—Twitter and elsewhere—and I do not think the reaction has been uniformly negative.

Coming on to your main question, I do not think it is Ofsted's job to "win people over". It is not a marketing organisation, but it does need to enjoy the respect of everybody it works with and to be making inspection as good as it can be. Part of that is taking feedback and using it really well, as it has been. In particular, I have seen a real trend towards using feedback much more, interacting much more directly and being seen to listen, understand and adapt inspection models in the light of it. I think the children's services proposals that have just been published, for example, very much reflect taking feedback on the first iteration of the single inspection framework and using that. I will have a particularly strong focus on system feedback and using it well. If we do that well, that will earn people's respect. You can never please all of the people all of the time, but you can make people recognise what you are doing.



- Q15 William Wragg:** Every sensible politician would agree with that. In terms of Ofqual's perception survey last year, it was suggested that they were struggling to win the trust of headteachers and teachers. With your experience in Ofqual, is there anything that in hindsight you wish you had done differently or better to win the trust of that profession?

Amanda Spielman: I think the big lesson I have taken from Ofqual is that substance and perceptions can be in quite different places, and you need to do just as much work on both. I think regulation can be quite technical and an organisation can end up spending a lot of time on the technical side. Over the last year or two, Ofqual has got much better on the communication side as well—thinking about the messages and the translation of what is often very difficult, complex and sometimes counterintuitive into things that people can think about, discuss and work on. That means you can get the feedback you need to iterate and develop, and you can get the conversation at the right level so that it becomes a constructive debate everybody can engage in, rather than something where people are on different levels.

- Q16 Stephen Timms:** It seems to me that you probably do need to build some bridges with the teaching profession, but from your answers it sounds as though you do not really recognise that as something you need to do. What can you tell us about that?

Amanda Spielman: There has been a huge amount of positive reaction. I saw two very negative union comments on the day it was announced, which got echoed in various press articles. I have not seen a great deal of negative reaction apart from that. Working with the system, taking the feedback—but I do not think a specific Ofsted campaign is appropriate. I have made a point while I have been at Ofqual of visiting a lot of schools and colleges—I have put quite a lot of time into the FE and skills system—so I have gone out and met people. When I have seen people writing interesting things anywhere about qualifications and the exam system, positive or negative, I have gone out of my way to meet them, to talk and to understand. I will continue being as interactive and inclusive as I am now.

- Q17 Stephen Timms:** But surely it is not unreasonable for teachers to feel that the person in charge of inspection should be someone with experience of teaching, which you do not have. I just wonder whether you recognise the need to at least build some bridges there.

Amanda Spielman: It is something that will always be there—that I have not been a teacher—but I think I have so much else that I have to make sure the team as a whole does have plenty of direct experience. I truly do not see that as a real impediment to doing the job. There are precedents as well in this country—and in Wales, I think. There have been previous chief inspectors in Ofsted and in Estyn who have not taught.

- Q18 Chair:** Stephen's line of questioning is underpinned by the fact that we have had a significant number of teachers writing to us on this very issue of your lack of experience in the classroom. Are you minded to give some consideration to how you might tackle that problem in the run-up to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

actually taking up the post?

Amanda Spielman: I think you are defining as a problem something that I do not see as a problem. I see it as simply part of making sure that the way Ofsted is structured and managed over the next few years makes sure that the right skills are in the right places. The chief inspector is, at the end of the day, the chief executive of the organisation; they are not a person out separately from the rest of Ofsted. Ofsted is a corporate entity that collectively does these things that are needed. I do not want to define myself as Ofsted incarnate, if you like.

Q19 **Chair:** The chief inspector is not necessarily a manager of skills; he or she is a person who really has to give leadership to the organisation. You have to have the sense of connection, not just to your own team but to the people you are interfacing with, which is obviously the schools.

Amanda Spielman: And I think that sense of connection is very much reflected in so much positive reaction from so many heads that I have read in blogs and newspaper articles and on Twitter. That is precisely because I have put a lot of effort into connecting over the years. I think the ASCL response exactly reflects that I have always put an enormous amount of weight on that.

Chair: Ian, would you like to pursue the issue of children's services?

Q20 **Ian Mearns:** I could be cynical, Amanda, and say that headteachers would be wanting to welcome a new chief inspector because they have a vested interest in doing so. Anyway, not to worry. The quality or otherwise of local services for children and family support can often take on the importance of life or death and have the most profound impacts on the life chances of children, so what experience do you have of children's services and children's social care?

Amanda Spielman: As my CV makes clear, I have no direct experience whatever. The only experience I can point to on this is seven years as a governor in a school in a fairly tough part of London, where there were many children needing social care of various kinds. I was involved first hand on occasion at governing body level with the flow of the casework, the kind of load the school was managing from its end, the interactions with social services that were required to put the right support in place and, alas, a couple of times when people came up for exclusions, looking at very complex and difficult histories. I have to learn this. This is why in my discussions I have put getting fully up to speed in children's services very high on my plan for the next six months. It is complicated, it is important, and it is much less visible to the public at large than the school system.

Q21 **Ian Mearns:** You mentioned in answer to the previous question that you wanted to make sure that Ofsted was structured and managed to make sure that the right skills are in the right places. Ofsted used to have a deputy chief inspector responsible for social care, so given your background, would you consider reintroducing such a post?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Amanda Spielman: I have not started studying the management structure. There is a senior individual, Eleanor Schooling, with responsibility for this side. If I am confirmed in the job and preparing for a handover, it is something that I will be able to take a view on at that point. If your report is favourable, you will be able to ask me that.

Q22 **Ian Mearns:** Okay. Again, though, Ofsted has been without a permanent director of social care for over a year now.

Amanda Spielman: That is clearly something that concerns me and something that I would like to take—

Q23 **Ian Mearns:** So how confident are you that there will be enough senior people around you with children's services experience, and who would you rely on to bring you up to speed?

Amanda Spielman: I have already been discussing with the interim head, Eleanor Schooling, to ensure that I meet a range of people with perspectives. I have also inquired about the current recruitment and I am told that the feedback on current recruitment of qualified HMIs and social carers is going well. I am getting some assurance about the short-term security of the service and I am very interested in thinking about the long term.

Q24 **Ian Mearns:** Something to think about, if your appointment is confirmed, is that the timetable for the current cycle of single inspection framework inspections has kept slipping and is now a year behind the original plan. Will that be a priority in your in-tray from day one?

Amanda Spielman: I have been made aware of that and, yes, it is part of what needs to be considered. I think some proposals were published yesterday that take account of feedback from the first couple of years of the single inspection framework on how to ensure that it works, is not unduly burdensome and has the right impact on the system. I will be looking very much to see what the feedback is on that.

Q25 **Ian Mearns:** Do you anticipate that very early in your tenure there will be an urgent meeting with the Association of Directors of Children's Services?

Amanda Spielman: I will be advised by the senior team but, yes, I am taking soundings from all the stakeholders in the system with important information. That is very important.

Q26 **Ian Austin:** Serious case reviews are on the rise according to Ofsted, but are to be scrapped. How do you want Ofsted to work with the new independent national body that will oversee the new reviews? Shouldn't that be Ofsted?

Amanda Spielman: You are taking me beyond anything I can discuss. I am not yet there and not fully in the picture on who is already involved and what conversations are going on. I am afraid that is taking things a bit further than I can today.

Q27 **Ian Austin:** Can I ask you about what thought you have addressed to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

tackling radicalisation and extremism? What practical plans have you considered to honour Ofsted's commitment to ensuring that they have no place in schools and to make that a big priority?

Amanda Spielman: It is clearly a large item of concern. They are on the Ofsted agenda, but it is clearly something bigger than just Ofsted. Radicalisation is a national concern. I will want to ensure that Ofsted plays its full part. I am not yet part of the discussions to understand how that is being thought about and developed.

Q28 **Chair:** What do you think that full part is?

Amanda Spielman: That is an interesting question. To come back to Ofsted as an inspectorate, it is ensuring that inspection is alive and sensitive to whatever signs are detectable, without creating an impossible burden on the schools to police children's lives at a micro level.

There is always a balance to be struck in any kind of inspection on this: building the kind of understanding of research, evaluation, understanding about what is detectable and when, to ensure that Ofsted is linked into the best thinking about what is doable, without imposing impossible burdens on itself or schools. I am sure there are many conversations and discussions going on about this.

Q29 **Ian Austin:** I think everybody would concede that your predecessor, Sir Michael, was unafraid to rattle cages—challenge the establishment, challenge teachers and the profession—particularly on this issue recently. He was not afraid to set out the facts as he saw them, however controversial that might be. What assurance can you give us that you would be able to do that on an issue like this? Can you assure us that you would continue what I think has been very important work to identify and deal with unregistered, illegal schools and all of that? Is that something that you have looked at?

Amanda Spielman: Have I looked at illegal schools? Not yet. I am not at Ofsted. I can't demand sensitive information; much of it is not public. What I can say is that over the last five years I have gone out of my way to make sure some of the most difficult and uncomfortable things in the system that I have been responsible for have been aired and have become discussable. Things that people have not necessarily been comfortable talking about did get pushed up and become part of the agenda. I don't think anybody has ever suggested that I am afraid of talking about difficult things.

Q30 **Chair:** Airing something is one thing, and it is an important thing to do, you are absolutely right. The Ofsted structure has a chief operating officer for dealing with the sorts of things you said should be dealt with. I think the line of questioning that Ian is teasing out is: what kind of leadership or vision do you actually have for the role of Ofsted in this complex and at the moment very challenging area of children's services?

Amanda Spielman: Children's services in particular?

Chair: Yes, as an example, because that is what we are really talking

about, following on from Ian's original line of questioning.

Amanda Spielman: I think that Ofsted's first job here is shining a light on what is happening and where. Are there things that we don't already know about of which signs can be seen and not picked up? Does that information funnel that inspection creates throw up the right things to the right places to make sure that, collectively, we understand—

- Q31 **Chair:** You can apply that to any role of any inspection system. It is the kind of leadership and vision you have for your role in connection with children's services.

Amanda Spielman: It is very hard, and clearly the ultimate vision is to make sure that all children are protected from harm. What Ofsted sees in education and children's care services is only a part of children's lives. I don't want Ofsted to be put to an impossible commitment to prevent any harm ever coming to any child, because so much happens outside the systems for which it is responsible. Nevertheless, there is a really clear view that, within the scope of its remit, there should be vigilance, communication and effective systems that pull together all information to make sure that, both in specific institutions and at system level, everything is harnessed that can be harnessed. That is how I see Ofsted's part.

Chair: We will come back to child protection later. For now we are looking at school standards with Stephen.

- Q32 **Stephen Timms:** Can I go back very briefly to the question of your relationship with the teaching profession? You have prayed in aid the National Association of Head Teachers. I had a note from the NAHT yesterday that said: "Some have questioned Miss Spielman's lack of teaching experience. We don't see this as a bar to her holding the chief inspector role", exactly as you have said. They go on to say: "We would like to see Miss Spielman build bridges with the profession and look forward to her ideas on how she will do this. Because she doesn't have a teaching background, this dialogue is even more important." You haven't yet given us any ideas about how you might build bridges with the teaching profession. I wonder whether, on reflection, you have any.

Amanda Spielman: I think I have. I have said that I have gone out of my way to build structures that collect a lot of feedback, to create direct interaction between Ofqual and the teaching profession and to put a lot of my own time into conversations. I would expect to continue to do that to get both first-hand feedback and system feedback.

- Q33 **Stephen Timms:** It sounds as though you are saying that you already have very good relations with the teaching profession. It doesn't sound as though you've got a task here of building some bridges.

Amanda Spielman: There are several hundred thousand people working in the education system. There is some stuff that you can do directly, but you cannot interact directly with 400,000 people. You have to work through organisations and individuals. I have taken the stakeholder side of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the Ofqual job incredibly seriously and talked to a great many people and built relationships. I expect to do the same here. I cannot give specific commitments to work with person X or person Y, but I see this as a big part of the job.

- Q34 **Stephen Timms:** It would be interesting to know which organisations you think you will need to work with to address this. What I really wanted was for you to comment on something that Sir Michael Wilshaw told us earlier this month. He said that the school system is still mediocre and poor in secondary. Do you agree with those remarks?

Amanda Spielman: I do not have access to the full Ofsted evidence base. Because Ofsted inspects on a risk basis, the reports that come out in a given period are not necessarily representative of the full system, so it is very hard for me to say whether those remarks are fully justified or not. I do not think that I can comment. What I can say is that I will make sure that anything I say fully reflects any concerns that the evidence takes me to about the system. I will not be afraid to say whatever it says.

- Q35 **Stephen Timms:** We have referred already to the outspokenness of Sir Michael. Are you willing to be as outspoken as he has been?

Amanda Spielman: I think my style is very different. I will come back to this: I have no fear of saying anything, but I want to make sure that it is absolutely grounded in the evidence that Ofsted holds. I would not want to get drawn into expressing personal opinions. That is one of the difficulties for any holder of this job—to make sure that they stay anchored to the organisation and its evidence.

- Q36 **Stephen Timms:** Sir Michael has produced monthly commentaries. Will you do that?

Amanda Spielman: I think that is a very interesting way of approaching it—a useful way of drawing attention to things for discussion, rather than relying on just one annual blockbuster.

- Q37 **Stephen Timms:** So that means you will carry on doing that, does it?

Amanda Spielman: It is not a definite yes. I have not discussed it with the team or the board, but I think it is an interesting and probably constructive way of approaching things.

- Q38 **Stephen Timms:** Do you agree with the point that Sir Michael made that the debate at the moment focuses too much on structures, and not enough on standards?

Amanda Spielman: I am extremely interested in what happens in the classroom. Everything in education starts with what happens in the classroom. Looking at Ofqual, we defined or set up the purposes of the new GCSEs, for example, and consulted on them. The first purpose was around providing a good curriculum, so that the right things would happen in the classroom—I am paraphrasing, because I cannot remember the precise words. For me, that is where everything starts, and everything else layers out from there. I will want to make sure that the focus is on



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the substance of the education that children and young people are getting—all the services, I should say.

- Q39 **Stephen Timms:** Do you think that we are talking too much about structures at the moment?

Amanda Spielman: Structures get a lot of air time. People talk about the things that they find easiest to talk about, and I think Ofsted's job is to make sure that it directs the attention to the right places.

- Q40 **Ian Austin:** What do you think is the biggest challenge facing education in Britain?

Amanda Spielman: At the moment, the single biggest challenge, I would say, is absorbing the enormous amount of change going through primary, secondary and FE. I talked to someone recently who has been around since the 1970s and asked him whether he could ever remember a time when there had been so much change, and he could not. If you look at it from the perspective of the teacher, from the conversations I have with teachers, that change is what is typically preoccupying them at the moment.

- Q41 **Ian Austin:** The reason I ask is that I do not think that you need access to Ofsted's detailed data to know that standards in British schools are, on the whole, not good enough, and that there is a real problem when on basic skills we are behind not just South Korea or Finland, but Poland, Estonia or Slovakia, which have improved much more quickly than us over the last few years. If you are not coming to this saying, "Standards aren't good enough; I've got a mission to drive them up, and this is how I'm going to do it. I'm going to be evangelical about school improvement and enabling young people in Britain to fulfil their potential," I'm worried about that, if I'm honest.

Amanda Spielman: There are lots and lots of places where standards are not good enough, but if you simply start with that as a blanket, you antagonise and alienate people on day one. I have to be properly discriminating in this role, and say, "Here are the places where things aren't good enough; here are the places where they are." If you simply produce entirely negative messages, then you don't actually improve things.

- Q42 **Ian Austin:** But is it not the chief inspector's role to be a crusader for high aspirations and standards? If the chief inspector is not saying, "I think British kids are as good as any in the world, and they've got to have the best education possible"—if that's not your driving mission—

Amanda Spielman: Raising standards is absolutely my driving mission. That's why I have spent 15 years in education. We need to be careful about words like "crusader" and "warrior", because when you start crusading you can often lose track of the objectivity, honesty and integrity that are needed to do this well. You need to say, "This bit is 60% good, 40% bad. This bit is 70% and 30%." Things are not necessarily black and white. You have to motivate people in the system to work on the right things in the right places.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

You used the word “crusader”. I see it more about being dogged and relentless in places where that is needed. As inspector, I want to show the qualities of relentlessness, persistence and determination, rather than shout at people.

- Q43 **Chair:** I think Ian is really probing you on the question of whether you simply want to be a good inspector, or whether you want to make a difference in our school system. Which is it?

Amanda Spielman: I want to make a difference. I want what Ofsted does to make a real, constructive difference.

- Q44 **Chair:** What difference would that be?

Amanda Spielman: It would be real change in educational outcomes and children’s services outcomes—I have to keep reminding myself that there are all these pieces across the board over my term of office—partly by reference to domestic measurement, and partly by reference to international comparisons. I so much want to see real improvement. It has been immensely frustrating to me over the years to see international comparisons come back showing a flat-ish picture.

Chair: Marion, you have got a question, I think.

- Q45 **Marion Fellows:** I haven’t a question; just a comment. I am very careful here, because there is no such thing as a British education system. I keep playing into this. Scotland, Wales and other parts of the United Kingdom—Great Britain—have different educational systems. I take fully on board that, if you were to be appointed to this role, you should have a passion for improvement, and you should want to see education and children’s achievement improve vastly in England, where your remit runs.

Amanda Spielman: Indeed, and that was what took me into education 15 years ago. It is precisely that, and it is why I am still at it.

Chair: Ian, have you finished your line? You have got more to ask about assessing standards in a minute.

Ian Austin: Yes.

- Q46 **Chair:** Before you do, Ms Spielman, you said earlier that you want to be, or would be, anchored to Ofsted’s evidence. Aren’t there two problems with that? First, you are going to be dealing with other structures, such as the national schools commissioner. He might have a different set of data, and if you are steadfastly anchored to yours, doesn’t that make it different to have a dialogue with other forms of educating processes?

Amanda Spielman: One of the most important parts of the role for me, looking forward, is getting those interfaces right. We are in a system that is evolving rapidly. The regional schools commissioner and the national schools commissioner are very new, and there is not yet a fully developed understanding of the role of each in relation to the other. It is about developing that understanding, making sure that the interface is right and making sure that there is consistency in how data is used and interpreted.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The worst thing for schools would be to feel that there are different people around all judging them in different ways on different interpretations. That is clearly not helpful.

Another thing I draw from my last 15 years is real insight into educational measurement and what it can and cannot do. That is something where simplistic interpretations can often be quite unhelpful. I will want to put a lot of emphasis on making sure data is interpreted correctly, its limitations are understood and that it is used really well. With changes in primary testing, secondary testing, GCSEs and so on, there has never been a time when it is was more important to really think about what data is saying in this transitional period, and making sure that it is used and understood well and never misinterpreted.

- Q47 **Chair:** Okay, so you have got to apply the data and you clearly enjoy interrogating data. What you have not actually mentioned, as far as I can remember at this point at least, is leadership of schools and the importance of governance and so on. Is that something that you are going to be thinking about, or do you think that it is only the data that matters?

Amanda Spielman: Far from it. The whole reason you need an inspectorate is because data can tell you a certain amount, but it can never possibly tell you everything that you want to know to be sure that any kind of institution is providing the right thing. The three big things for me, given that there is always this data that sits over on one side, are, as I said before, as follows. First, are the right things happening in the classroom? Is the education adding up to what it is meant to do? Is the leadership of the organisation making sure that happens in a way that is good and sustainable, so that teachers and everybody else want to work there, and is that likely to continue on a good track? Then, of course, there is children's safety. You cannot tell that from performance data; it is a whole different area. Human judgment, to make sure that a school or children's home really is a safe and good place for a child to be, is absolutely fundamental. Those are the pillars: the classroom, the leadership and the safety, and everything around that. All of those are why you need Ofsted and why you need—

- Q48 **Chair:** My next point was going to be that if you are anchored to data, it would not necessarily help you much in child protection or children's services.

Amanda Spielman: No. There is a great deal that data can do, but there is a great deal that it cannot do. Making sure that inspectors throughout the system really understand how the different parts are being triangulated to come together is incredibly important.

Chair: Ian, you are going to talk a little bit about assessing standards.

Ian Austin: On the data?

Chair: No—question six.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q49 **Ian Austin:** On the data, yes. You have been talking about data. What do you think is the right balance between using data and inspection?

Amanda Spielman: The right balance? I cannot put percentages on it. We have a system in which both are given weight. I think that is right. I think it is worrying when too much weight is put on data, and I am not comfortable when it is completely ignored. A good system uses both and triangulates well to get to something that reaches good conclusions.

Q50 **Ian Austin:** Under the new Progress 8 regime, the schools that are judged to be best are going to be exempt from routine inspections. Do you think that is a good idea? Is that something you are comfortable with?

Amanda Spielman: Exemption from inspections is a sensitive area, because a school's performance can change. That is something I want to understand and look at. I do not yet know enough about how that is actually working in practice to be able to give a definitive answer, but it is something I will certainly look at.

Q51 **Ian Austin:** How would you identify schools in leafy suburbs, with strong intakes, that are simply coasting?

Amanda Spielman: That is very much where the great change towards much more use of progress, rather than attainment, measures has been crucial over the last few years. It has done a lot to wake some schools up to the idea that their results maybe were not as good as they thought they were.

Q52 **Ian Austin:** Are you worried that schools could do well on Progress 8 but still not deal with issues like tackling extremism or safeguarding? How would you identify that?

Amanda Spielman: That is why inspectors on the ground are really important. I just talked about the three things you want to see—

Q53 **Ian Austin:** But they would not be inspected. That is the point I am making.

Amanda Spielman: That is why feedback from other sources that tells you whether there are concerns is incredibly important. Exemption from inspection is a very powerful lever and one that I really want to look at and understand. You're right: changes in Progress 8 are unlikely to pick up and show deterioration in some areas that are pretty much unrelated to educational achievement.

Ian Austin: Thank you.

Q54 **Marion Fellows:** In an increasingly academised—I can't say that word; we do not have it in Scotland—system, will the role of the national schools commissioner become more significant than your role, if you are appointed, as chief inspector?

Ian Mearns: It's a pity Sir David Carter is not sitting next to you.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Amanda Spielman: Shame. I think they are both very important jobs. Working out over the next few months and couple of years how that interface should work is really important. I do not yet have the position to be able to have those conversations, but clearly, we have to have a consistent understanding of our respective roles that adds up to something that works for schools, at the end of the day, and makes sure they get the right information and the right support from the right places.

- Q55 **Marion Fellows:** You have already alluded to the fact that you do not have enough background information and so on. How do you propose to manage this relationship with the national schools commissioner? Do you have some ideas about that? There will have to be some sort of personal relationship and working relationship.

Amanda Spielman: Absolutely. Good relationships between national organisations typically have to run at several levels. It would not be all about me, though a good relationship at the top is a big advantage. It would also matter about having the right relationships with the regional commissioners, their organisations and Ofsted regional staff. I do not yet know what is already there, though I know some good conversations have already happened. It is about making sure that that is conceived as an interface that runs all the way up and down the organisation, and making sure that for every school in the system, there is a constructive interaction between the two parts.

- Q56 **Marion Fellows:** Do you think we really need both Ofsted and regional schools commissioners? Do you not think that spending more money directly on children might be a better way of raising standards?

Amanda Spielman: We have had an independent inspectorate for many, many years in this country. If that independence has meaning—in a sense, if you transferred all of its functions to the regional schools commissioner, at that point the independence would be lost because they are part of Government; they report into the Department for Education. For me, thinking about the essence of where there is value in having that independence helps to determine the right division of responsibilities.

Of course, on the second part of your question, I want it to be as efficient as possible. The last thing you want control and regulatory mechanisms in your system to do is soak up any more of the money spent on children than they need to. Ofsted has taken some quite significant budget reductions over the last few years, so that reflects a shift of resource more into direct child-related activity and away from Ofsted.

- Q57 **Marion Fellows:** But you would not want to see that at the expense of regional schools commissioners.

Amanda Spielman: I do not have a view on it.

- Q58 **Ian Mearns:** When we had the national schools commissioner here a couple of weeks ago, we talked to him about circumstances in which a multi-academy trust would be allowed to expand. I put to him a model where there was a five-school multi academy trust and three of the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

schools were improving well and two of them were requiring improvement—would that trust be allowed to expand? He said, “Probably yes, because there was evidence of improvement within three schools.” I said, “Yes, but that might just be because there are three good heads.” How would you know whether the multi-academy trust itself was having an impact on school improvement when two schools out of five are requiring improvement? Knowing what we know about the way in which Ofsted is looking at local authorities and their role in school improvement, should Ofsted have the power to inspect multi-academy trusts, including their central services?

Amanda Spielman: The system is evolving rapidly. I cannot imagine that, in a few years’ time, it would be possible to have an inspection system that does not include multi-academy trusts. Taking one step back, the point at which the autonomy that academies enjoy is defined is actually at the level of the trust rather than the schools. So within each multi-academy trust there are typically some policies and processes that are set at trust level and some that are set at school level.

There are also, in many multi-academy trusts, quality assurance processes. It is very hard to get a good handle on the quality of a school that is part of a bigger system without understanding what is common and coming from outside the school and what quality assurance already exists and is being applied. To take a view in that situation effectively, if you are understanding the schools well enough, you are almost by implication getting a view on the trusts. Over time I think it is highly likely that we will end up with a multi-layered inspection model, and for me that would be a good development, but I think it is something that is part of the evolution of the system. It is not something that you can just snap a switch and say, “This is it.”

- Q59 **Ian Mearns:** From the perspective of Ofsted, that sounds quite resource-intensive. I think we already have over 900 trusts and, with something like 16,000 schools yet to convert to academy status, one can only guess what the final number of academy trusts will be. Given that there are good, bad and in between, what role should Ofsted play in multi-academy trusts that are clearly failing the schools and children that they oversee?

Amanda Spielman: Ofsted’s job is inspection and this is part of making sure that there is the right understanding and interface with the RSCs, who are charged with school improvement or dealing with situations where things aren’t good enough, to make sure that Ofsted is there, inspecting at the right moment and giving the right and most constructive feedback that helps to make sure that the public money spent on interventions is used as effectively as possible. To me, a huge amount depends on getting that interface absolutely right.

- Q60 **Ian Mearns:** Do you think it is an important role for Ofsted to make sure that public money going into multi-academy trusts is spent on school improvement for children?

Amanda Spielman: It is the Education Funding Agency that oversees the finances of academies, not Ofsted. Ofsted looks to see if the right things



HOUSE OF COMMONS

are happening, but it does not scrutinise school budgets and the allocation as things currently stand.

- Q61 **Ian Mearns:** Though that could ultimately have an impact on educational outcomes, so is that something that you might want to address?

Amanda Spielman: I do not think it is for me today to start pitching for an increase in Ofqual's remit, to take work away that is currently done by other Government agencies.

Ian Mearns: What that a Freudian slip—Ofqual?

Amanda Spielman: Yes, it probably was a Freudian slip—apologies. I knew I was bound to do it at least once.

- Q62 **Chair:** A key role of the Chief Inspector is to think about how Ofsted will evolve and if you have got an evolving school system, which you have already said is the case, you must accept that Ofsted will have to change. We will be moving on later to your view and vision of how you think Ofsted should change, because you must have some ideas. You cannot take charge of an organisation without knowing where it needs to go—that is important. Before we move on to further education and apprenticeships with Stephen, I just have one quick question. What is your view of the outstanding grade?

Amanda Spielman: My view? I have seen and heard a lot about this and thought about it. It is clear that it is something that—

Chair: No, what is your view?

Amanda Spielman: My view? I am quite uncomfortable about some of the effects I see it having in the system, I have to say. I am open to a discussion about it.

- Q63 **Chair:** So you think that you might want to scrap that grade?

Amanda Spielman: It is something that I would like to see fully discussed.

Chair: Okay. Thank you.

- Q64 **Stephen Timms:** Have you ever been a member of a political party?

Amanda Spielman: Not since my early 20s.

- Q65 **Stephen Timms:** Can you tell us what your political activity in your early 20s was?

Amanda Spielman: Yes. Was it before the Lib Dems? I was a Young Liberal and then a Lib Dem, I think. I can't quite remember, but I think it carried on past the merger. It's an awfully long time ago.

- Q66 **Stephen Timms:** Your CV shows that you had a 20-year career in corporate finance. You then took some time out, went on maternity leave and did an MA, and since then you have been working in education. Looking back on that quite dramatic change of direction, what was the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

reason you made that change?

Amanda Spielman: I had time on maternity leave to reflect on what interested me. I had a lightbulb moment when I realised that I had always read everything I had ever come across about education. This was before I had children old enough to be at school, so it was not about my children. It was just that I suddenly realised that that was where it was at. It was the most important thing I could imagine being part of: the development of the future. That was where I wanted to work.

Q67 **Stephen Timms:** Were you bored with corporate finance at that point?

Amanda Spielman: I always found the work I did very interesting, but I was never interested in it as the business of making money. I am not particularly motivated by money. It is a world that I fell into because I had some of the skills and aptitudes that made me successful there, but I never felt really strongly motivated to be part of it. When I had that realisation about education, it really was the most exciting time of my life. I suddenly realised that there was a purpose—there was something I wanted to pursue for its own sake.

Q68 **Stephen Timms:** Can I ask you about further education? Nearly two thirds of the general further education colleges that Ofsted inspected last year were rated as “requires improvement” or “inadequate”. Why do you think the sector is doing so badly?

Amanda Spielman: I have already had some very interesting conversations about this with the team. Taking one step back, I have spent quite a lot of time—it is not very visible from the CV, but a lot of Ofqual’s work is in vocational qualifications and things that primarily affect FE. I established a vocational advisory group to the board so that we get specific advice on that side. I encouraged the establishment of a vocational qualification directorate. I have been involved quite closely in our work on apprenticeships and functional skills and in the early stages of looking at the Sainsbury recommendations. This is a very strong area of interest of mine.

The changes throughout the system have obviously had a very specific impact in FE. GCSE resits are clearly a very live area of concern. There is a great deal of teaching and capacity required in FE that has not been required in the past, so that is reshaping their agendas. A lot of FE colleges are very big, very complex organisations doing a lot of different things. The more things you pull together into a picture, the harder it is for everything to be good simultaneously. That may be part of the reason—I don’t know yet—but, as I said before, I want to make sure that what I say is properly discriminating and that it looks at the components and the causes. I don’t want to express a blanket concern; I want to express an informed view that really highlights the places where things are needed.

Q69 **Stephen Timms:** Ofsted produced a particularly critical report last year about the quality of apprenticeships. What do you think Ofsted might do about that? What levers does Ofsted have over apprenticeships?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Amanda Spielman: Ofsted effectively has a single lever, around the inspection of provision, so focusing its inspections in the right places and making sure that the right information surfaces from those at institutional level and in aggregate is the thing it can do. That is the part it plays. I would want to make sure that everything that is properly surfaced is surfaced in the clearest, most constructive way possible.

Q70 **Stephen Timms:** From what you have seen, are you worried about the quality of apprenticeships?

Amanda Spielman: It is such a big and diverse system that I think almost nobody really understands its full ramifications and complexities. The schools world is simple in comparison with the world of vocational education. Finding ways of making it comprehensible so that people get their heads around the right things and focus in the system is on the right things is more of a challenge.

Q71 **Stephen Timms:** One of the complexities is likely to be the number of training providers, with the apprenticeship levy; it may well be that large numbers of employers will become training providers. How will you ensure that Ofsted has the capacity to deal with the large number of inspections that that might lead to?

Amanda Spielman: I would want to have very early discussions with the senior team about the planning and the thinking there to make sure that the provision can be put in place. If it could not be—well, it has to be, but if it was going to require any additional resource, we would have to think about where that would have to come from to make it happen. That is the kind of planning that I am sure Ofsted is doing all the time, especially at a time of great change in the system.

Q72 **Ian Austin:** Do you think the Ofsted board should have more people with experience of further education?

Amanda Spielman: Clearly, the appointment of the board would not be my responsibility as chief inspector, but to have voices reflecting the different parts of the remit is certainly incredibly helpful. At Ofqual, I have done my best to encourage people from FE in particular.

Q73 **Ian Austin:** What about on the inspection side and in the senior staff at Ofsted; do you think there should be more experience of the FE sector there?

Amanda Spielman: The Ofsted COO very much has an FE background. I think he was the national director for FE before he stepped into that role.

Q74 **Ian Austin:** Do you share Sir Michael's concerns about the quality of FE in general? He was pretty critical, I think it's fair to say, about the FE sector.

Amanda Spielman: I have not yet seen the evidence that underpins that very broad opinion he expressed.

Q75 **Ian Austin:** But from what you know of FE generally, do you share his views or do you think that was overstated? It was quite controversial at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the time, I think.

Amanda Spielman: It was controversial. Because I do not have access to inspection evidence I cannot say that he is wrong, but I can say that what I have seen from where I sit and the conversations I have in the system suggests a rather more complex, mixed picture.

- Q76 **Chair:** Most people do not actually have access to the data—or very much of it—but they can still form opinions, and the opinion about some aspects of further education, as mentioned by Ian in connection with Sir Michael’s comments, is that it could improve. Do you think that there is something that Ofsted could do to help that improvement process along?

Amanda Spielman: I don’t yet know, is the short answer. Whereas my involvement with schools means that I have first-hand experience of seeing how the process of inspection affects schools and how schools react, I do not yet have first-hand experience of seeing how colleges react to inspection. That would be quite important for me to understand before expressing an informed opinion. You are right, and there is a difference between informed and uninformed opinion. On the schools side I can express at least an informed opinion, although I don’t have the evidence base. On colleges and the other areas that Ofsted inspects I am not yet at the point of being sure that I have an informed opinion.

- Q77 **Chair:** Disraeli was famous for pointing out that there are “Lies, damned lies and statistics.” What he was really getting at was that you can think about statistics and data but you have got to be able to make judgments about things. If I walk into a shop and decide what food I am going to buy, I am not going to start thinking about the data and the flow of the food coming in and out of other people’s baskets. I am going to make choices that I want to feed my children and so on. The data stuff is important, there is no doubt about that, but it is judgment that matters as well. That is the important thing that the chief inspector must do.

Amanda Spielman: Yes, absolutely—informed judgment.

- Q78 **Chair:** Could I just ask one technical question about inspections? You can get a primary school with 50 pupils or a FE college with several thousand, yet the inspection system appears to be much the same for both. Do you think that is right, and if not, what would you want to do?

Amanda Spielman: Is it right? First of all, everybody who uses or relies on an inspection report wants it to give an assurance that their child, or them, is going to be safe and well educated in that system. It has got to satisfy that requirement, even in the case of quite small provision. We cannot simply say that because it is small, we won’t bother.

- Q79 **Chair:** I am really talking about the bigger picture. A common complaint about inspection of FE colleges is that the inspectors can perhaps only go to one department rather than every department, or can only go to one site rather than more sites, whereas if they turn up to a school with 50 pupils they are going to see absolutely everything. They are not going to be able to do that with the same current system of inspection of a FE college. That is on the table as a concern. Do you think that is a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

justifiable concern or do you think it might be okay?

Amanda Spielman: This is where you need different levels of sophistication in your approach to inspecting big institutions. Inspection is a kind of audit. The audit of big institutions typically involves looking at the internal processes of control and quality assurance to make sure that the senior management in large and diverse institutions themselves have a really good understanding of what is going and where. That way your effort can be directed to the places where it is most needed or where there are the greatest reasons to have concerns about those internal judgments, with some independent selection and testing to make sure you are putting in an appropriate level of reliance. Inspecting big institutions is clearly a much more complex job. It is perfectly possible to have the same fundamental principles of what you want inspections to deliver but for the methodology by which you achieve that to be rather different in different cases.

Q80 Catherine McKinnell: What do you think are the key issues to be considered in Ofsted's forthcoming review of early years inspection?

Amanda Spielman: You are taking me again into an area where as yet I have no context, so it is very early for me to express views. As in every other area, this is complex, and in early years you are dealing with something that is largely—not entirely but to a considerable extent—private provision, so that, as small businesses, providers can take themselves in or out as they choose. It is about understanding the characteristics of the individual organisations and individuals, the whole system and what parents are relying on it to provide. Making sure that you don't lose the wood for the trees is extremely important here.

Q81 Catherine McKinnell: Do you think it is right that early years no longer has its own directorate at Ofsted? Is that something you might be looking to change?

Amanda Spielman: There is nothing absolutely set in stone about the organisation of the current senior management structure. I have already discussed that. There is a COO at the moment overseeing everything. We have already agreed that we will review the way in which the different parts of Ofsted report through to the chief inspector. I am open to all constructive suggestions at this point. It had not been raised with me specifically until you asked that question, but yes, it is worth looking at.

Q82 Catherine McKinnell: During a recent visit to a nursery school, Newburn Manor, in my constituency, it was made clear to me, in a view shared by nursery schools across the area, that they feel very much forgotten about in terms of policy announcements. There was no reference to them in the Government academies programme. How will you ensure that they, and every part of the early years sector, get the focus and prioritisation that they deserve but also need, given that the Government have placed reform and expansion as a priority?

Amanda Spielman: I have put early years on my list of things to spend a significant chunk of time on in my first few months, because I am very



HOUSE OF COMMONS

conscious that I know least there. More generally, when I think about a role like this, I will think top down about the allocation of my time to ensure that the smaller areas, which can get drowned out when there are big things going on, do not get lost.

Going back to something I just said, that was precisely why in Ofqual we established a vocational qualifications directorate, because the demands of general qualification reform were tending to get things shunted to one side, or put a bit further down the agenda, and we did not want that to happen. I will look at ways to ensure that all the right pieces stay there with the right proportion of management time and attention.

Chair: Okay. We are going to move on to child protection, with Lucy.

- Q83 **Lucy Allan:** A very important part of the role is clearly the protection and care of the most vulnerable children in society. I would like to have an understanding from you of how great a responsibility you feel that is, relative to the other aspects of the role.

Amanda Spielman: It is an enormous responsibility. For most children in the various education systems that Ofsted inspects there are fully competent, involved parents and families that you know are there to flag up if anything is going wrong, and to take action on behalf of their child. In children's services, and child protection particularly, you are dealing precisely with a place where that cannot be relied on. You know that the social care system is having to provide the care and the advocates. Those are the children who are genuinely enormously at risk. I feel a very powerful sense of responsibility there.

- Q84 **Lucy Allan:** To what extent would you say that the buck stops with Ofsted if something goes wrong?

Amanda Spielman: You cannot say that the buck stops with Ofsted; the buck has to stop with the people who are actually directly responsible for the children day to day in social care. An inspectorate can pick up a great deal, but it is not there every moment of every day. That is the nerve-racking trade-off: you know that you cannot be sitting invisibly on the shoulder of the social worker, the children's home staff member or whoever it may happen to be, every minute of every day. Yet what you do and say will be relied on.

- Q85 **Lucy Allan:** Following the Rotherham child exploitation report, there was a finding that Ofsted was still a reactive organisation. How would you address that?

Amanda Spielman: It has to be part of the strategic planning to think about where is the volume of work, what are the ways of planning, thinking, collecting feedback to ensure that the approach is not just reactive, that there is a model that is continually tested in the light of development findings, but that it is live and part of the organisation's work.

- Q86 **Chair:** Before I go on to wider issues, the question of child protection is in part about structures and leadership, and that does come through in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

some of the issues that have popped up in Rotherham, Doncaster or wherever. On this issue about Ofsted being reactive, is there not a role for Ofsted to set out what kind of structures and leadership should be in place?

Amanda Spielman: I think that is very much what the common inspection framework is doing: looking at leadership. I was very interested in the findings reported this week. The messages that came out most strongly were, firstly, that the quality of leadership was very strongly associated with the quality of services on the ground—and the framework very much addresses that—and also that it was relatively uncorrelated with budgets and spending. So I think it supported the approach that has been built into the framework. So I think the evolution of that framework is the key mechanism through which Ofsted makes sure that it is proactive, not reactive.

Q87 **Chair:** How would you personally make sure that on the ground the question of child protection is being properly dealt with?

Amanda Spielman: As chief inspector—you said me personally.

Q88 **Chair:** Yes, as chief inspector.

Amanda Spielman: My job is firstly to make sure that children's services have a big enough part of the time that is spent by the senior team on setting strategy and on taking feedback. A management team in an organisation like Ofsted has to make sure that it doesn't just become all about process. I know it isn't, but you mustn't end up just saying, "Yes, 271 out of 282 inspections are complete, so we are on timetable."

Q89 **Chair:** We are in danger of straying into data again—

Amanda Spielman: I am saying that you have to make sure that you have got the substantive information. What is the learning from it? What is it that we are getting from this that is telling us whether the focus is right or the focus needs to adjust? So it is that internal feedback loop. I am saying, precisely, that it is not just the data. The whole point is to make sure that management does not get lost in data; because as you work through something like this new framework—any system—the qualitative information about what is happening on the ground, that then leads you to adjust, is something that never ends. You have to make sure that people value that feedback loop as much as they do the "Yes, we've done the job."

Q90 **Chair:** So would you, for example, tool up your regional directorate to take a specific interest in local authorities and keep an eye on those that were known not to be as good as others?

Amanda Spielman: I cannot say that they are not doing that at the moment. I don't yet know; I haven't worked with the regional directors yet.

Q91 **Chair:** Thanks. Now, you are going to be leader of a great organisation, and like all great organisations they are going to be in a state of change,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

because change is often a driver to improvement. To that extent what discussions have you had with Government about any changes that might be made to Ofsted, either by you or the Government?

Amanda Spielman: As yet, I haven't. The appointment process was run very properly without discussions with candidates about what they might or might not do, so aside from setting out my stall at the various interviews I have had no other discussions. I only heard, myself, the day before the announcement was made. There was a referendum coming and various people, I think, have been quite busy on other things; so my view is that when my appointment is confirmed that is the right point at which—

Q92 **Chair:** You mentioned a referendum. What was that about?

Amanda Spielman: There was this funny thing happening somewhere, wasn't there?

Ian Mearns: Not so funny, I think.

Q93 **Chair:** So you set out your stall, as you just said. Did you have on that stall any suggestions of what Ofsted should look like in, say, five years' time?

Amanda Spielman: Yes, we have talked about many of those things. We talked about MATs and getting a more multi-level view of the system. What else did we talk about? It has got subsumed into my total preparation. Everything I have said today has been consistent with what I said at interview. I did not say anything about turning Ofsted into something very different. I talked about the national and regional school commissioners, about making sure that the system evolves constructively so that these more complex pieces fit together in a system that works properly for everybody.

Q94 **Chair:** In its previous guise in the last Parliament, this Committee talked about having Ofsted split into two to deal with education and children's services. Some of the lines of questioning that we have pursued this morning have drawn from the sometimes confused picture of those two chunks. Have you been thinking along those lines yourself?

Amanda Spielman: It is something that I have always been aware of. In any public system, dividing lines can be drawn in different places and there are often competing logics to organise things one way or another. The child-focused logic of the current arrangement is clear, it lines up with current central and local government alignment, and from what I have seen so far, it works. But it is a question that I suggest you ask me in 12 months' time.

Q95 **Chair:** If you are confirmed in appointment, you are going to be leader of a team. They will expect a vision—"this is where we are going". I am not suggesting that you will do that in speech form, but when most organisations get a new leader, they want to know what that leader is thinking, what the vision is, where the horizon is and what is beyond it. Can you give us a couple of sentences that might feature in such a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

statement in, say, seven or eight months' time?

Amanda Spielman: A couple of sentences—I haven't written this one. The mission that appears on the Ofsted letterhead—"raising standards, improving lives"—seems to me as valid as ever. My message would be continuing that focus, clarity, purpose and unity and making sure that we have an organisation that is really pulling together and understands its place in the world, where we all move forward together.

Chair: Okay. Last but not least, Lucy is going to ask about preparations for the role.

- Q96 **Lucy Allan:** Sir Michael told us that he is going to continue over the next six months at full throttle. During that period, how will you prepare yourself for the role without undermining the good work that he is doing?

Amanda Spielman: The first thing is to do as much inspection training and shadowing as I can. There is no reason not to start doing as much of that as can sensibly be timetabled. As I have said, children's services and early years—the bits I know least about—will be my top priority there, though I would like to go across all of it.

Another thing is to start thinking about system evolution. There are some external players who I will clearly be meeting before January. In my current role, I meet people anyway. I can't say more about that—I can't talk about the early conversations.

I am absolutely delighted by the flow of good advice that I have been getting from many parties. Quite a lot of it has been public. We have seen letters from people like John Dunford, Matt Hood and Richard Vaughan in the TES.

I am also thinking about processing and using that to help really shape up the agenda, because Michael Wilshaw has done an enormous amount around inspection—improving inspection, getting clarity and sharpness into the system. The level above that—thinking about the system, how it adds up and how that translates, especially around the NSC/RSC role, the development of MATs and so on—is the piece that feels like the logical next step to build on. Having time to reflect, to plan and to get a lot of input over the next few months will be really helpful.

- Q97 **Lucy Allan:** Of course it is going to be a busy time at Ofqual between now and then, with GCSEs and A-levels. How much of your time do you think you will be able to spend on preparation for your new role?

Amanda Spielman: Quite a lot, because I have already resigned from everything school-related that I have been doing. I resigned from ARK and Floreat on the weekend of the announcement. STEMNET is just going through a merger, but it completes at the end of this month and I have agreed that I will step down from my trusteeship as soon as that is done. I am doing everything I can to clear the decks so that I can give this the attention it deserves.

Chair: Okay. Amanda, thank you very much indeed for coming along



HOUSE OF COMMONS

today and answering our questions. It has been a fascinating morning. We will now go into private session. Thank you for the preparations you made for today. We will publish our report in due course.

Amanda Spielman: Thank you all.