

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Accountability Hearings](#), HC 341

Wednesday 25 October 2017

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; Michelle Donelan; Marion Fellows; James Frith; Emma Hardy; Trudy Harrison; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell; Thelma Walker; Mr William Wragg.

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Witness

I: **Rt Hon Justine Greening MP**, Secretary of State for Education.



Examination of witness

Witness: Rt Hon Justine Greening MP.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, Secretary of State. Welcome to the Committee. For the benefit of the tape, could you state your name and your position?

Justine Greening: I am Justine Greening. I am Secretary of State for Education and I think it is the best job in Government.

Q2 **Chair:** Good. I think many people would agree with that. I want to start off with a number of statistics, if I may. Around 195,000 children use Government-funded childcare in settings that are less than good and in the most disadvantaged areas double the percentage of children are in early years provision that is not good enough. Only 54% of children eligible for free school meals reach a good stage of development by the age of five compared to 72% of their better-off counterparts. Just 33% of students on free school meals get five good GCSEs compared to 61% of their better-off peers. The state of the nation report found that only one in eight children from low income backgrounds is likely to become a higher income earner as an adult. At current rates of progress it will take 120 years before disadvantaged young people are as likely as their better-off peers to achieve A level or equivalent qualifications. Just 1.3% of children who are taught in alternative settings get five good GCSEs. More than a quarter, around 9 million, of working-age adults in England have low literacy or numeracy skills. At university, 24% of students in receipt of free school meals enter higher education by age 19 compared to 41% of non-free school meals students. While more disadvantaged students are going to university than ever before, which is a good thing, they are still less likely to attend top universities, are more likely to drop out of university and are more likely to get lower degree classes than their more affluent peers.

If the first rung of the educational ladder of opportunity is identifying social injustice, would you not accept that there is major social injustice throughout our education system and what are your priorities in dealing with these problems?

Justine Greening: I think you are quite right to highlight it, Robert. First of all, congratulations to you in your new role. I think you are quite right to highlight the statistics in the way that you do, which is almost the pipeline of how disadvantage starts from the moment children are born, arguably even before some children are born but then it compounds on itself. I could add a stat to yours, which is, for example, 90% of children growing up in London will have access to three outstanding primary schools within three miles of where they live but the statistic for children growing up in Bradford is just 3%. There is a big regional variation that we need to look at. You are absolutely right. As you know I have made social mobility, or whatever we call it, equality of opportunity, the driving mission of the Department for Education.



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If I can briefly touch upon the points that you have raised, because they are so important, and I think we should start off by recognising that Britain has never been a country that has had equality of opportunity and that needs to change if we are going to make the most of our people and of our country. None of us should accept that somebody's future is so determined by the start that they get in life, whether their own personal and family circumstances or where they happen to be growing up. These are things that absolutely must be changed and they must be changed in a wholesale fashion. I think Government can be a massive driving force behind this but that is not going to do it alone. It is going to need communities, businesses, the civil society groups that are concerned about this to all work together.

You are right to highlight early years. We know that there is, for example, a word gap that opens in vocabulary between the very youngest children even before they get into primary. As you know, we are working to scale up the provision of early years but also increasingly to look at the quality of it. When children get into primary there remains an attainment gap. It is an attainment gap that has steadily closed over primary and secondary but it is still there and it is one of the reasons why we see opportunity close down for children who are coming out at secondary level with fewer and worse GCSE grades than they otherwise would have been able to get if they were having a better start.

Crucial to bending up the arc of opportunity for children at schools are great teachers and investing in the teaching profession, alongside the reforms we have made to curriculum and, of course, the changes we have made to the broader school system on academies and preschools but then going on to look at education post-16. Young people in our country have never had a good enough choice of options post-16. For overwhelmingly most of us, if we wanted to demonstrate that we could go right to end of our education and follow it all the way through because we were good enough to do that, the principal route available to us to demonstrate high potential was to follow an academic route, to get A levels and then to go on and do a university degree. Technical education has not been at the world class level that our young people deserve and as a consequence the half of our young people now who do not go to university, who simply want a different route to continue their learning, need and deserve a much higher quality path for technical education, one that is high quality and respected and designed by employers, that streamlines them through into careers.

You mentioned universities and while we have seen huge steps forward in the numbers of young people going to university and the proportion of young people from disadvantaged families being able to go to university—I was the first person in my family to go to university and I know how much it transformed my prospects—there is still much more to be done to make sure that young people can take informed choices about degrees and the university they are going to and have a much clearer



sense of the outcomes that they are going to get from the investment that they make.

I will make two final points that are important. We need to work in a much more streamlined way with businesses, and that is where the career strategy that we are launching shortly comes in, but more fundamentally than this we need to build on the apprenticeships, work that we are doing on the apprenticeship levy, which is really driving a culture change steadily through British business, to make sure that young children even in primary schools are getting their ambitions set high, are aiming high and setting themselves some broader goals that they will then be able to work towards. We need to see companies having a smarter approach in a more wholesale way in developing young people's careers when they finally get into the workplace and, in terms of early years career development, lifelong learning so that people do not leave education and then that is it. These are the next important steps that I think we need to come on and set out our ambitions around.

I will finish where I started, which is that all of this is one strategy but we need to recognise that when we are putting in almost macro national policies for curriculum they often land in different communities in different ways. The sense of place and the regional disparities that we have in our education system really matter. One of the reasons we have brought forward opportunity areas is working holistically in the most entrenched places where we find opportunities constrained to shift those and more steadily looking at our programmes to tilt them towards that bottom third of areas where we know education outcomes can be better.

Q3 Chair: We are going to come on to these individual things in a bit. Related to my first question, there are 394,000 children in need on the radar of social services who may not be getting free school meals, just above the free school meals, and there are likely to be many more that we do not know about. There was a manifesto commitment saying there would be a review of why the outcome for these children is so poor. Where are we with that manifesto commitment and the review?

Justine Greening: More broadly, we will be setting out a broader piece of work looking at the outcomes for children in need. This comes on the back of the Children and Social Work Bill and rolling that out, which is all about how we can make sure that children's services and children's social care improve steadily over time. You talked about some of the outcomes of those young people from our education system. To my mind, they are not acceptable. I do not accept that these children have less potential than their peers they are growing up. I do not accept that children who end up outside the mainstream education system and in alternative provision—as you said, 4% of them will get a GCSE in either maths or English at a good grade. That is compared to 64% of children in mainstream schools. None of these are things that we should accept. I have already set out some changes that we will be bringing forward in



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relation to children in need and social work but we now need to similarly challenge the alternative provision sector.

Q4 **Chair:** Just to confirm, is the review underway?

Justine Greening: Yes, we are already pulling together the different components of it. I announced in the Conservative Party conference that we would be getting on with some changes within alternative provision. I think we know what we need to do. We do not necessarily need a review to spend time looking at that. There is some excellence in the AP sector and we now need to spread that everywhere.

Q5 **Chair:** I am going to come on to alternative provision. I meant the manifesto in terms of children in need.

Justine Greening: We will be getting on with that work.

Q6 **Chair:** Can I come to alternative provision? Having looked at this and looking at a recent report from the LKMco think tank, education and youth think tank, it seems clear that alternative provision is one of the greatest social injustices in our education system, perhaps of our times and possibly a modern version of the workhouses of the Victorian era, despite the individual work of many good professionals and teachers in those alternative provision schools. This report says that every day 35 of the most disadvantaged children, equivalent to a full classroom of children, are permanently excluded from school. Their research suggests that these official figures significantly underestimate the actual number of children that this affects. Once a child is excluded they are twice as likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher, twice as likely to have a supply teacher. Only three in 10 excluded young people achieve level 2 qualifications by the age of 20 in comparison to nine in 10 who have not been excluded. Among the top 20 local authorities for large pupil referral units there are three local authorities where 100% of places for excluded pupils are in less than "good" provision. Figures suggest that this is costing the economy £2.1 billion in education, health and criminal justice.

Is this not a scandal and has alternative provision been neglected over the years by every Government? Should this not be a serious priority? I know you mentioned this at your party conference but should this not be a serious priority for you as Education Secretary?

Justine Greening: It is a serious priority. It is something that I have been concerned about as an interest and a concern that I have brought into this role, as you know. That is why I was quite keen to set out our ambition to do better in alternative provision, both at primary and secondary. When you look at the varying outcomes for young people, the spectrum is very wide. The children and the young people who are in alternative provision themselves have a very varied degree of challenges and part of the problem is that they are together in one place with one education outcome and one education system trying to deliver for them. 80% of them will have some kind of a special educational need. If that



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had evidenced itself in a different way other than behaviour then my sense is we would have a very different approach to these young people.

We are kicking off a review in relation to exclusion. That was announced as part of the race disparity audit outcomes. That is a process question but much more broadly than that is the question of how we can make it a race to the top for quality on alternative provision. If you look at some primary referral PRUs, they will work very differently with their local primary schools so that the child is not permanently or systematically excluded. It is a child who can spend a couple of days at their school and then maybe two to three days in the primary PRUs. Those sorts of models see the rates of those young children going on to be in alternative provision at secondary level dramatically falling and that is what we should be aiming for.

When I visited my local primary PRU all of those children had an underlying driver as to why their behaviour and their schools had found it difficult to cope with them in the mainstream. Those underlying root causes need to be addressed and we need to see this in the round in the work that children's services do. We also need to understand what works and build up that cadre of evidence base in the same way that we have for primary and secondary in areas like maths, English, geography and so on.

Q7 Chair: I understand you are a great fan of the Sutton Trust, which is a very reputable organisation. They say that 88% of young people, 94% of employers and 97% of teachers say that real life skills are as important as academic qualifications. When your predecessor set up the Careers & Enterprise Company, said that the careers passport would be a fundamental role of that. Given the role that the careers passport can play in increasing social mobility and helping with diversity, can you update us on your plans or the Careers & Enterprise Company's plans to develop the careers passport that would galvanise these activities?

Justine Greening: You are right to highlight that. When I came into this role, I looked at the DfE work in three areas. One was knowledge and skills, the second was young people getting the right advice at the right time and the third was great experiences that grow them more as people so that they come out of our education system as rounded people, able to cope with life but hopefully thrive in a modern country. I met Lord Young, who has been a big proponent of the careers passport, only last week to talk through some of their proposals and ideas. It clearly very much ties into what we just talked about of young people getting great experiences as they go through the education system. I think the Careers & Enterprise Company has done a very strong job over its first two years of existence in making sure that enterprise advisers are in so many schools. They are working systematically to make sure that we have cornerstone employers who are really focused on our schools in opportunity areas. We are interested to talk to them about what the next step is in relation to the kinds of ideas behind the careers passport.



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Q8 **Chair:** Is it going to happen and, if so, when?

Justine Greening: I think we do need a way for young people to demonstrate their accomplishments alongside the academic attainment that they are achieving through the school system. That is very important. It is important for whether they are doing a CV or a personal statement as part of their university application.

Q9 **Chair:** My final question before I come to colleagues is that when I was in post as Minister there was a £60 million fund that was given to providers to incentivise them to hire apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds. It was agreed that there would be a review of how that £60 million would be spent, that it would last for one year but there would be a review. What has happened to that review and the £60 million?

Justine Greening: That is a good question, Robert. I think that work is underway. I am very happy to update you once we have completed it. As you know, the challenge is to make sure that apprenticeships, like every other element of our education system, especially once you talk about post-16, are not only high quality but are accessible to all of our young people. You know that we had a big focus on making sure that there was a higher proportion of BAME young people going into apprenticeships, and there is, but also more broadly that we tilt the work to make sure that we are enabling more vulnerable children, some of the young people we have just talked about, and more disadvantaged children to understand the opportunities that an apprenticeship can give them.

Q10 **Lucy Powell:** I am very conscious that you have a very broad brief now, so I will keep this section quite brief. As Robert rightly said and as you rightly highlighted, the biggest indicator of how a child will do when they reach GCSE is their development at the age of five. How can you and your Government justify that of the extra £9 billion that you are putting into early years support over the course of this Parliament, three-quarters of it will go to better-off families and less than 3% of that money will reach the most disadvantaged?

Justine Greening: The strategy in relation to delivering 30 hours, which I think is what you are referring to, is a significant scale-up to help working parents be able to access more free childcare. We have doubled that from the current 15 hours, which is open, to 30 hours. That is now rolling out steadily. We have had some very good responses from parents so far. Overwhelmingly parents are saying it is helping them. What I am trying to explain is almost the backdrop to why we made this policy choice because I think it is important. You have set out, Lucy, the lens through which you look at that. What I am saying is the lens through which the original policy was designed was to help people get into work and tackle the cost of childcare for working parents. Do we want to make sure that there is strong, high quality provision for the youngest children in early years? Absolutely. 92% of two year-olds who are benefiting from early years education are now doing so in settings that are rated good or outstanding.



You are right to highlight the fact that if we are really going to shift the dial on social mobility we need to look more carefully at how we can have proper improved access for families, because although that offer is there we do not always see the levels of take-up that we need. That is why we are focusing on that and we are working in communities to do that. We are also looking at the communities that have high take-up, how they have managed to achieve it and what we can then take to other communities. More broadly, as I said, understanding from a more evidence based what works agenda. We know how powerful the work of the Education Endowment Foundation has been on primary and secondary in relation to disadvantage. What we want to do is set up some similar capacity for early years so that we can really start to understand how to scale up accessing quality for the young children that need it most.

Q11 Lucy Powell: It is not just the 30 hours, of course. It is the tax-free childcare. It is a huge amount of money going to better-off families to access quality education and it is clear that that will entrench some of those social inequalities.

On your final point before we move on, if you want to come and look at some evidence that the Early Intervention Foundation is working on, you are welcome to do that in Manchester where we have a pioneering scheme that is very strongly evidence-based led. One of the biggest impediments to being able to reach the hardest to reach families with those evidence-based schemes is the fact that local authority budgets in early intervention have been absolutely slashed and burned and we have seen many Sure Start centres going as well. Isn't it the case that for all the platitudes and rhetoric around social mobility, we really are failing children in the earlier stages of their lives?

Justine Greening: I couldn't disagree with you more, actually.

Lucy Powell: Why?

Justine Greening: I think this country has never had a proper social mobility strategy that has sought to join up all of the stages of a child's and young person's life and then improve outcomes for them at every single stage. We are bringing that forward. Secondly, we have more provision for early years being created than ever before. Surely the first thing we need to do is make sure that there is access in order to improve the quality of that provision once it is in place, and we are doing that. Thirdly, we are seeing the attainment gap steadily close. There is a lot more work to do and we need to make sure it happens faster because of the timelines that you set out, Robert, for the pace of change. We should be really clear that this is a longstanding, generations-long challenge that we all need to work on.

The policy of 15 to 30 hours was about making childcare affordable and more accessible for working parents. We also know that that is important for children's improvement and home learning environment to be growing



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up in households that are not workers. That helps set their aspirations high too. All of this has to be seen in the round and I fundamentally disagree that children are getting a worse start, which is what you are saying. I think we have never invested more in helping them to get a better start but there is more to do and we need to make sure that as a strategy overall it does work.

Lucy Powell: What I am saying is the most disadvantaged are losing out the most, but anyway, I am going to hand over.

- Q12 **Emma Hardy:** The *Telegraph* published an article in September that said the number of four year-olds starting school without being able to speak properly is on the rise. You mentioned earlier the importance of oracy in the early years to give children, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds, that good start. With a third of designated Sure Start centres having been closed since 2010, what are the Government doing to ensure that children from these disadvantaged backgrounds have the language skills they need when they start school? How can you increase and raise the prestige of oracy in the early years?

Justine Greening: First of all, we can scale up capacity that is available for them, which is what we have been doing, and we can make sure that that capacity is at a higher quality, which is also happening. If you look at the take-up of disadvantaged two year-olds, that has risen by 13 percentage points since 2015. We do need to make sure that there is a continued upward trajectory on the quality of those settings. As I said, I think we need to look more systematically at building the evidence base on what works at that stage in improving vocabulary. We also set out our plans at the election to see more nursery provision directly within primary schools themselves and we will be bringing forward our proposal in relation to a capital fund so that we can see more schools able to work with the youngest children before they arrive as pupils at the school itself. I was in one of our local primaries on Friday and I think that will be a step that many primaries massively welcome.

- Q13 **Emma Hardy:** But it is particularly in relation to oracy, because what we have seen over the past years is the focus on reading and on writing and they are ignoring the importance of oracy. With how formal the early years curriculum is becoming, it has been lost altogether, so it is particularly to answer that part of it: what are you going to do to raise the importance and prestige of oracy in the early years? Quite simply, if children cannot speak properly they are never going to be able to write properly and the Government do not seem to have realised this.

Justine Greening: We have absolutely realised it and it has been informing the steps that we are taking in relation to improving childcare and early years provision. It is why I talked in my opening statement about the need to tackle the word gap that we see children from different families arriving with in school. Part of that is also understanding how to more effectively work with parents. We know that many parents would like to do more to help their child's vocabulary come on but are not



always sure or confident about doing that. We will introduce some pilot work and research to understand how we can do that more systematically for more parents. As I said, I think this is a piece of work that obviously needs to be led by Government but there is a huge amount of work within local communities. Six of the areas have published their first opportunity area action plans and it is interesting that this early years topic that we are talking about is part of all of them. I think everybody recognises there is a common view that you need to start at that stage if you are going to improve outcomes and opportunities for young people.

- Q14 Thelma Walker:** You talk about working more effectively with parents but then we have just referred to the cuts to Sure Start. Having been a head teacher with a Sure Start centre on site, I know that we have very effective partnerships with parents through family outreach workers, through projects like babies into books, which of course links to the oracy and the enjoyment of reading. We had toothbrushing projects, which helped with the dental hygiene, so there was health there as well. There were so many positive projects that if you talked to professionals who were involved in those projects they would say it was working, it was effective. Family outreach workers who would work closely with parents out in the community, bringing parents in to work alongside their children, all of that was effective and that provision has been cut over the last few years.

Justine Greening: It is a provision that local councils are responsible for. What I am setting out today is our national strategy and councils are able to increase the council tax and manage their own revenue streams if that is what they feel is worthwhile within local communities. There have been children's centres opened in recent years.

- Q15 Ian Mearns:** Secretary of State, I have to challenge that. My own local authority is still in the process of losing from the revenue support grant about £140 million per year. The cumulative loss over the seven years or the 10 years from 2010 to 2020 will be well over £1 billion taken out of the revenue support grant. The local authorities may have capacity to raise council tax to a cap for about 2% but above that they can't. If my local authority cuts 100% of every other service, it will still have to make cuts in adult social care and childcare by 2020 in order to balance the books. So, we won't empty your bin, we won't cut your grass, we will have no leisure centres or libraries, but we will still have to make cuts in adult social care and in children's services to balance the books by 2020. That is completely and utterly ridiculous.

Justine Greening: The reality is that we are putting, purely through the expansion of childcare and early years places, an extra £1 billion into—

Lucy Powell: For better-off parents.

Justine Greening: You say better-off parents. Actually they are working parents, Lucy. I think a lot of working parents may not necessarily say that they were better off in terms of the overall population.



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Q16 Lucy Powell: Okay, they are better off than others. In Manchester for 10 years we have given free nursery provision. Now because of the cuts to local authorities, plus your new funding formula for the early years, we are having to switch money from parents in my constituency who are worse off. They are now not going to get free childcare but I am, my kids will. So I will get it free and they won't. That is what is an unintended consequence of your policy. It is going from worse-off families to better-off families.

Justine Greening: I don't agree with this. I think we are right to have a policy that encourages and supports parents to be able to get into work. It is important that once that expansion of the early years provision has continued that we make sure it gets to be even higher quality, that we make sure that disadvantaged young babies and children are in early years and accessing it. As I said, the access rates have actually gone up and I think the extra investment that is going into early years should be welcomed.

Q17 Lucy Allan: Secretary of State, we have seen over recent years an increasing number of children and families being sucked into the child protection system, with 70,000-plus children in care and some 400,000 children subject to child protection intervention measures. Senior figures within the sector are expressing real concerns that this is untenable in terms of the economic cost, the social cost and, really importantly, the emotional cost to families and children. We have had piecemeal sector reviews looking at different parts of the care system but we have had nothing that really recognises the severity of this current position that is going to inextricably deteriorate. Scotland has launched a fundamental root and branch review of the care system, looking at legislation, culture, ethos and practice within the sector. Has your Department considered a similar kind of review and, if not, what will you do to tackle this problem head on?

Justine Greening: First of all, you will remember that we passed the Children and Social Work Bill in 2016 and there are a range of outcomes from that that sit alongside a much broader strategy to help make sure that children's services are high quality. That will mean improving social work practice and there is a range of reform there that is already underway following the Bill passing. We have set clear professional expectations through the chief social worker role that is now in place for the first time. We are making sure that there is stronger training and support. That will sit alongside the introduction of an accreditation and assessment scheme for social workers.

Q18 Lucy Allan: Secretary of State, that is about the quality of social work. I completely understand that and that is what that Bill was designed to achieve. I am talking about the numbers of children and families being sucked into this system when we can all accept that that is not a good thing for society, it is not a good thing for children, it is not a good thing for families. What I am asking is: are we going to do a more comprehensive fundamental root and branch review of how in fact we can



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do better by these children and reduce the number of children being sucked into child protection and the care system?

Justine Greening: I agree with you, Lucy. What I am saying is we have done that piece of work. "Putting children first", which was published in July last year, set out some of these steps. We are also going to be putting in place a new regulator, Social Work England. That is what we are doing in relation to the profession itself. In tackling the issues that you have just raised, it is important that we have a high quality social work profession. These people have to take incredibly hard decision every single day. They have probably some of the most challenging roles that anyone can have in our country.

But along with that we are working to enable local authorities that are strong, a bit like with our school system, to work more collaboratively with local authorities that are weaker to help lift up their practice as children's services departments. There is a fair amount of work with the legislative change and the regulatory architecture within which children and social work happens. There is a significant amount of work with children's social workers themselves to lift that quality overall and then the work of organisations and local authorities to make sure that we can act where we do see failure happening.

The final point to make is in relation to Ofsted where the inspection regime will shift to be a more frequent one that will mean we can pick up failure earlier. In doing so, we can work with local authorities that are at risk before they end up being in a position where they get an inadequate rating.

Q19 **Lucy Allan:** Do you accept, though, that we cannot continue on this upward trajectory of families being brought into the system? However good it is, we cannot continue to have increasing numbers of children being taken into care. It is simply untenable to have this relentless increase.

Justine Greening: It is certainly not an increase that any of us want to see and what we need to do is have a system in place, the right processes, high quality people in children's social work so that we are able to work with families earlier in order for that not to happen. But as I think we all recognise, there will be some children who absolutely do need to be moved out of the situation that they find themselves in at home and that is the best thing for them. In relation to the circumstances where early intervention can make a difference then absolutely. That is why it is so important to see this work pushed forward. It is not easy, there is no doubt about that, but it sits together as an overall strategy.

Q20 **Thelma Walker:** I welcomed the recent review on primary assessment but Ofsted would say that too many schools are still teaching to test. How do you think this can be addressed?

Justine Greening: I felt it was quite important to take a look at primary assessment in relation to how we could make sure that we struck the



right balance between having an assessment process that was effective but also one that was not overly burdensome on teachers and schools. Ofsted is sensibly pointing out that our young people get a broader education at schools than simply getting through, for example, to strong key stage 2 results. I think the primary assessment consultation and our subsequent response to it, which I think was very measured and was done listening to teachers and the National Association of Head Teachers, was a very sensible measured step forward in making sure that we have a primary assessment system that will work for the long term. The messages that I got back from primary school teachers is that they wanted to see some change but then, importantly, some stability and that is what we tried to achieve with the new primary assessment outcomes.

- Q21 **Thelma Walker:** I would say, and I know many professionals would say, that it is good that the key stage 1 assessment, test will go, but it is talking about projected 2023 by the time it goes. Is there any reason as to why it is not going today?

Justine Greening: That is because what we are wanting to do is assess progress and at the moment that progress baseline is effectively key stage 1. Some schools that get children at an earlier age than that, and often do a huge amount of work with those children prior to key stage 1, do not really get any credit for that work and we don't really get to see how much they are able to do either. The key stage 1 changes are in relation to saying that we are going to move that baseline right to the beginning of a child turning up in reception and we will have a better sense from that moment of the progress that they make. It was about having the baseline at the right place when a child enters primary.

- Q22 **Thelma Walker:** I think that many head teachers would say that now they feel more like a football manager with their SATs results making the whole school accountable and it is based on SATs results. The work that is done holistically with the whole child from their entry into school is often disregarded and that puts pressure on head teachers and teachers to constantly be teaching to the test. For year 6 in particular, most of their year they have the test booklets, commercial booklets that are used, creativity being squeezed out, and the test, rather than being a waistcoat, is a straitjacket.

Justine Greening: I would not agree with your characterisation. I think we have focused on standards in schools. We needed to do that because when you looked at the many young people who are coming out of our school system unable to master even the basics of reading and writing, that was such a waste of their potential. Also the messages that we were getting back from employers was that they were getting young people turning up for work who apparently had good qualifications but actually could not write properly. We have been through the whole curriculum, both the primary and the secondary, sought to raise standards and we have pushed to get children up to a higher level. They are reaching those standards and I think that is the right thing to do for them.



If you look at the changes to GCSEs, all I can tell you is the anecdotal messages I have got back from teachers about GCSEs. They saw the previous approach as more jumping through hoops to get their children through GCSEs. The level of problem solving they now have to get their students to do is much more challenging but those young people are coming through with GCSEs in maths and English, truly understanding the concepts that they are being examined on. Yes, we have pushed the standards but the good news is that our young people are able to reach higher standards, our teaching profession is able to get them to that standard and I think we should all be celebrating that.

Q23 Thelma Walker: The regurgitation of facts in key stage 2 SATs booklets is not going to skill up children for the workforce in future life. That is what professionals are saying.

Justine Greening: Understanding how to construct sentences in English and understanding the building blocks of how maths works is crucial for children being able to build on that basic knowledge.

Q24 Emma Hardy: David Whitebread of Cambridge University pointed out that, "Even the advocates of baseline assessment have recognised that the relation between literacy at age four and at the end of key stage 1 is at a level that predicts only 50% of children's progress, that is that baseline assessment predictions are no better than chance in relation to any one child". Given these problems, will you commit to a full independent review of the piloting of the baseline and its effects before the scheme is rolled out across England?

Justine Greening: We did the original consultation that had quite an open question about when the baseline should be. I have been around lots of primary schools and talked to heads about what their views were. They had a variety of views but I think broadly most people felt it should be earlier than key stage 1. We have taken our cue from the consultation responses that we got back. We said we absolutely want to work with the profession to make sure that the baseline we put in is something that is sensible and that works effectively. We have taken our time to get through the consultation and then respond to it because I do want to make sure that we get this right first time. We are very conscious of the need to continue working in partnership. There is a debate about how to do it effectively and that is why we will consider that exceptionally carefully. I think broadly people know what the right strategy is.

We are now on to the piece of work about how you implement it in a way that is sensible, pragmatic but also gives schools a baseline that they can feel does enable them to get a sense of the progress they are making with children that come through their schools. For lots of schools who may have more challenging young people coming into them, who feel that they do not get credit for the work that they do in those earliest years, I think this would be an important step to make sure that they can demonstrate progress.



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Chair: Can we have shorter questions and answers, just because we have got a massive amount to get through?

Q25 **Lucy Powell:** Secretary of State, what have you personally learned from the collapse of the Wakefield City Academy Trust?

Justine Greening: I have learned that I was right to update the guidance, called "Good practice guidance and expectations for growth", because a lot of this is about what sustainable performance in that looks like and how you should then judge that sustainable performance before additional schools are given to trusts to develop. The main thing I have learned is that we were, and I was, concerned to make sure we had a more structured approach for seeing trusts develop. I think it is exceptionally important, not least because often they are taking on board schools that have underperformed in the past and those children need to be going into a trust that we can rely on being able to lift up the school's standards.

Q26 **Lucy Powell:** On the financial probity of that, we have reports and evidence of £300,000, £800,000, £216,000, lots and lots of big sums of money being transferred from schools to the trust before it collapsed. In addition, you will know of the Collective Spirit Trust that operates in my area in the Oldham area that recently had to close down a UTC that cost £14 million and no child passed a GCSE at that school. Again, there is lots of evidence of siphoning off of money to related parties and others. How can you justify, in your response to this Committee's report on multi-academy trusts, the statement, "Academies have a stronger financial framework and are held up for greater scrutiny than other types of state-funded schools"?

Justine Greening: When you look at the work that academies have done in lifting the standards of—

Lucy Powell: No, I am not talking about standards. I am talking about financial probity and their accountability.

Justine Greening: Okay, let's talk about financial probity. There is significantly more transparency around the financing of academies and trusts than there is around local authority-maintained schools.

Q27 **Lucy Powell:** When was the last time a local authority school siphoned off money?

Justine Greening: In relation to related parties, the rules are significantly tightened up. There are strong—

Lucy Powell: But when was the last time a local authority did that?

Justine Greening: Local authority schools are managed in a different way.

Lucy Powell: Yes, a better way.



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Justine Greening: The bottom line is, Lucy, local authorities themselves could only answer that question. One of the things I think we do need to improve is a clearer line of sight to how local authority-maintained schools are using the resources that they are given and how local authorities use those resources themselves in relation to the schools that they are still in control of. We tightened up the rules for related-party transactions and we have tightened up the criteria for growth. I have asked Lord Agnew to look at how effectively boards can operate and whether we need to take further steps in relation to that, but the reality is overwhelmingly that MATs that are taking over sponsoring academies that have previously failed have a good record of lifting those academies to be schools that are performing better for young people.

Lucy Powell: This is about accountability and financial accountability.

Justine Greening: Absolutely. They are accountable for outcomes and, like Wakefield, where they are not achieving those outcomes for young people we are taking action.

Q28 **Trudy Harrison:** For me, it is how the regional schools commissioner can be better supported to rebroker certain multi-academy trusts when they are not performing as they should. I personally found that process rather a grey area. Is that something that you acknowledge and what steps have been taken to improve that process of rebrokering when it is simply not working?

Justine Greening: The role of the regional schools commissioner gets triggered by a number of different mechanisms: a school being classed as coasting or one that does not reach its floor standards or, of course, an Ofsted rating as "inadequate". The judgment that the RSC then has to make is what is the right course of action. Is the best thing to go through a process of rebrokering or is it better to work with that school more directly on school improvement? I think there is a strong process there but it is important that we take smarter decisions in relation to how multi-academy trusts are able to take over schools when they are being asked to rebroker them.

At the end of the day, for me the key objective here is school improvement. It is about making sure that, whether the school is an academy that is inadequate or in special measures or a local authority-maintained school, we have the right plan in place that is resourced for that school to be able to shift to achieving better outcomes for its young people. We have seen more schools than ever before now rated as good or outstanding but there is still a tranche of schools, often in more disadvantaged communities, that are not delivering the education that those young people need and we have to now bear down. That is why the regional element of our education strategy now matters so much.

Q29 **Chair:** Can you try to do shorter answers, just because there are many questions that members want to ask?

Justine Greening: I will. They are complex questions.



Chair: I accept that.

- Q30 **Emma Hardy:** The Education Funding Agency conducted a financial management and governance review into WCAT in 2015 but the Department subsequently refused a Freedom of Information request to publish the outcome, claiming that, "It would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of the trust by affecting its bargaining position with the contractors". Do you consider that putting the trust's commercial interests ahead of the interests of the 8,500 pupils in WCAT schools is acceptable?

Justine Greening: We have done the exact opposite to that. The reason that the Wakefield Trust is having all its schools rebrokered is not to do with its finances. It is to do with the fact that it simply was not delivering for children who were at the schools in the trust and the assessment was that it would continue to fail to do that. That is why action is being taken to rebroker all of those 21 schools. As part of that we now need to unpick the financial relationships between the schools and the trust and then the provisional trusts that have been identified to take over those schools.

- Q31 **Emma Hardy:** What right will the parents of the children in those schools have to choose which trust comes and takes over their schools, or is that something that is going to be dictated by the Department for Education?

Justine Greening: We have announced some provisional sponsors for all 21 schools. We have worked with the local MPs concerned. It is now important that those new sponsors engage with local communities. That work—

- Q32 **Emma Hardy:** Sorry to interrupt. What you have actually done is told the schools which trust sponsor they are going to have and then said that parents can have a say after they have already had their sponsor chosen?

Justine Greening: That is not correct, actually. I hope that you will welcome the fact that the trusts we identified were provisional, not necessarily final, but we did want to make sure that there was a clear direction in rebrokering these schools to trusts that could put them on—

- Q33 **Emma Hardy:** Parents will have a choice over which they have at the end?

Justine Greening: That is the engagement that is happening right now.

Chair: Because of time, we are going to move to opportunity areas. Ian, do you want to kick that off?

- Q34 **Ian Mearns:** Secretary of State, you mentioned earlier on about regional variations and access to opportunities but despite numerous social work element problems, none of the 12 existing opportunity areas are in my region in the north-east of England. The problem with that is when it comes to accessing Strategic School Improvement Fund allocations, if there is no opportunity areas you are less likely to get access to those Strategic School Improvement Funds as well. Have you any plans to



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expand the opportunities programme and include areas in the north-east of England at any time soon?

Justine Greening: How we picked the opportunity areas was driven by two things. Principally the work of the Social Mobility Commission, looking at what they called cold spots where education outcomes were poor but also career and job outcomes afterwards were poor. We took our cue from them but then I also wanted to have very different communities. Some are coastal towns; some are more urban areas like Derby or Oldham; others are rural areas. Ian, I would be very keen to at some point look at how we develop the opportunity area work further but in the meantime let me reassure you that whether or not you are in an opportunity area, that will not affect the ability to apply for the Strategic School Investment Fund. Much more broadly, whether you look at that or other funds like the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund, we are tilting them precisely towards the areas like yours that we know we need to work more holistically in. It is not all or nothing with the opportunity areas. They are an initial piece of work that I wanted to get kicked off quickly. They are progressing well. I think we are learning from them already, but it is part of a much broader tilt of our efforts to go into the communities where we want to see better outcomes.

Q35 **Ian Mearns:** But you will accept that the north-east of England is the only region of the country outside London that does not have one of these areas?

Justine Greening: That is a fact, Ian, and it is something that I hope in time we can look at a next wave of opportunity areas. I want to make sure that the ones we have underway are working effectively. I recognise what you are saying, of course.

Q36 **Chair:** Are you confirming that just because a deprived area may not be an opportunity area, that does not mean that resources will not be given to those areas because they have all been put into the opportunity areas?

Justine Greening: Absolutely. Part of the opportunity area concept was making sure that some of the areas that needed the existing funds were applying for them in a more structured way. Part of the challenge we saw was that we had a lot of different initiatives that sometimes head teachers were simply unaware of, found it complex to apply for. With opportunity, in a sense what we are doing is trying to make sure that there is access to that DfE existing offer plus a core element of that that is locally tailored. The offer from the DfE is increasingly tilted towards schools like those in your area, Ian, that I agree we want to work more closely with.

Ian Mearns: The north-east is not without good education authority areas but it does have some distinct problems in certain places. To be a whole region without one single area, the only region to be without a single area, I think is a little strange.

Q37 **Lucy Allan:** I welcome opportunity areas as long as we can have



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absolute certainty that young people living in disadvantaged areas that are not forming part of opportunity areas are not going to be prejudiced in any way. I think you have just addressed that point. Am I right on that?

Justine Greening: I think so, yes. We have recognised that there are some areas where the challenge is not just inside schools, they are outside schools, and we need a more holistic strategy if we are going to raise education attainment. This is quite a tailored piece of work from the Department working with local communities. We have our DfE teams out there on the ground, so we are trialling a different approach and that is why we have had quite a measured—

Q38 **Lucy Allan:** Like Ian, I have significant areas of disadvantage within my constituency. Something I have found out about but did not hear from the Department is called the National Collaborative Outreach Programme and Aspire to HE, which is targeting areas within my constituency. Could you tell us a little bit more about that, how those areas have been selected and how it complements opportunity areas?

Justine Greening: The Department has graded areas between level 1, which was the highest attaining, to level 6, which is the lowest. We are tilting and targeting increasingly the programmes that we have already at the level 5 and 6 areas, which would cover the kinds of communities that you are talking about. It is a shift from a place where some of these programmes, for example maths hubs, were initially kicked off as very demand led to increasingly being more overt about where we want to target them to make sure that standards rise.

Q39 **Lucy Allan:** And the National Collaborative Outreach Programme?

Justine Greening: That is part of the work that is being tilted to make sure it is going to make the biggest difference in the communities that we think it can have an impact in.

Q40 **Chair:** Very quickly before we go on to school funding, how are you going to judge the outputs of these opportunity areas and will they be published? What is the timeframe?

Justine Greening: The action plans are very clear on what their priorities are, what they expect to try to shift and over what timeframe. The only thing I would add to that, Chair, is that we are trying to shift some entrenched disadvantage and that will not happen overnight. These are long-term pieces of work, in my view, that need to have some persistence and longevity behind them so that they start to shift ambitions and aspirations and outcomes on the ground over time. You will not see change happen overnight. We have gone into the most challenging places to try a different approach, but the teams on the ground and the partnership boards that we have put in place are very clear about what they are trying to achieve with the inputs, the activity and then the priority outputs they want to see.



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- Q41 **Ian Mearns:** I am trying to join up a couple of dots, Secretary of State. There do not seem to be enough good multi-academy trusts. How soon will you let Ofsted inspect multi-academy trusts so they can be improved? How many schools now are waiting more than 12 months for rebrokering because there are not enough good multi-academy trusts?

Justine Greening: I will write to the Committee with the statistics in relation to the second point you have raised. On the first point, Ofsted had an approach doing batched inspections. Their primary role is to be in schools looking at schools but for MATs they had also done these batched inspections.

Ian Mearns: They inspect local authorities, Secretary of State.

Justine Greening: They are taking a fresh look at how they can approach those in a more systematic and effective way.

- Q42 **Emma Hardy:** Bournemouth School is going to receive £4,800 per pupil in 2019-20. Winton Academy is going to receive £4,816 per pupil. These schools are 1.5 miles apart. One is a grammar and the other is a comprehensive. They get almost exactly the same funding despite very different levels of need. How has your national funding formula gone so badly wrong? Now there is a postcode lottery even when the postcodes are nearly identical.

Justine Greening: I could not disagree with you more. We had a two-phase approach on the national funding formula that we worked with councils on. I do not think anyone in this room can credibly defend the existing system, which sees levels of deprivation factored into current funding levels that are just plain wrong and out of date. If you believe in equality of opportunity and you accept that we have an accountability system for schools and results that are consistent for every single school, wherever they are, then you have to accept that we should have a national funding formula.

The way the formula works is very intricate—and I will not go into every single piece of it—but it absolutely flexes on two different levels. First, people needs and, secondly, where schools are. Each school is getting the amount that relates to the cohort of children that they have and it also then flexes in relation to that school's likely cost base. We had a huge amount of work done on this.

The phase 1 consultation was broadly accepted. We added in a further element to the phase 2 piece, which was mobility, which was an issue raised by a number of councils. Broadly, the second phase and the outcomes have been accepted by all commentators, including the unions. They may prefer us to have more money going through the formula, and that, of course, is always going to be an important debate. But there is broad agreement now that the formula itself is constructed effectively.

Chair: We must have shorter answers. We have a lot to go through.



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- Q43 **Thelma Walker:** I was delighted to see the Government's change of mind about more grammar schools being opened. But now we find that the grammar schools we do have are opening annexes—some of them, I believe, several miles away from the main school. Could we have a clarity about the legal distinction between an annexe and a school? Who is funding these annexes that are being built?

Justine Greening: Grammars, like other schools, can expand. There is very clear law in place in relation to the ban on new grammars remaining and the judgment in law is whether the annexe is sufficiently far away and different effectively to be a new school, or whether it is a true expansion of an existing school. That is often a legal question, but we will make sure that grammars that are expanding do a better job in relation to access and social mobility.

- Q44 **Thelma Walker:** Where is the money coming from to fund these annexes?

Justine Greening: There is a fund within the DfE for all schools to be able to expand. We want more good school places and there is funding available to do that. What I have said is I want grammars that are expanding to do more work, like the best ones do, in relation to being accessible to all children.

- Q45 **Thelma Walker:** It is not more grammar schools by stealth then?

Justine Greening: The law has not changed so there is no difference in relation to the legal framework.

- Q46 **Chair:** When will we be receiving the Government's response to my predecessor Committee's report on grammar schools?

Justine Greening: Very shortly. It has been drafted. It is getting all the relevant sign-off so I hope to have it with you sooner rather than later.

- Q47 **Chair:** Is that a Whitehall very shortly or a genuine very shortly?

Justine Greening: Very shortly, is what I am saying.

- Q48 **Mr William Wragg:** To avoid a pun, the response on grammar schools is slightly academic, given the lack of legislation in the Queen's Speech. Going back to school funding, the NAO said there was an 8% cost pressure facing schools with the original iteration of the school funding formula. With the £1.3 billion, what is that figure now?

Justine Greening: It means that there will be real terms per pupil protected funding over the final two years of the spending review. That is something that the independent IFS has confirmed as well.

- Q49 **Mr William Wragg:** Further to that, in terms of the efficiency savings on non-staff costs that the NAO also identified, has there been further consideration of any potential impact on classroom reductions and teaching time or subject offerings?



Justine Greening: We know that the NAO efficiencies are achievable. For example, when we have done a high level analysis, if the 25% of schools spending the highest amounts on non-staff expenditure were instead spending at the level of the rest, that alone would save over £1 billion. We will have efficiency advisers who will be out working with schools to help make sure that they can make the most out of the money that they have. The schools budget overall is going up over the next two years, by over £2 billion.

Q50 James Frith: I refer members to my register of interest. I am a director of a careers education company.

My question relates to funding of schools, particularly SEN provision and the completion of EHC plans. It is in two parts: what assessment has been done in estimating the number of children who might be of SEN level in mainstream education and what do you think is the impact of schools now having to contribute £6,000 per pupil from their delegated budgets? Do you think that is going to be a disincentive for the number of students receiving EHC plans because of the budgetary pressures that schools are under?

Justine Greening: As of January 2017 there are 1.2 million pupils that are SEN identified. That is a constant percentage in relation to overall pupils. It is just over 14%. We talked a little bit about they are more likely to be excluded and how we need to improve alternative provision.

On the introduction of EHCPs, three-quarters of parents say that they feel it has led to their child getting the help they need and schools are funded to meet that additional cost of supporting pupils with SEN, the £6,000 that you talked about. If schools can demonstrate that there is an additional cost above and beyond the £6,000 then the local authority is there and should be allocating a top-up cost to be able to cover that excess cost.

Q51 Michelle Donelan: I wanted to bring up the topic of funding pupil premium. Are the Government going to do a comprehensive review of how effective the pupil premium is? It does not take into account other levels of disadvantage, such as children who have suffered bereavement, mental health issues, family members in prison, and all of these things can impact just as much on academic attainment. When we are seeing schools cutting their counselling services and services that could offer support for those children, do we think it is important then to do a review and to see whether we are providing the right level of support to those individuals?

Justine Greening: It is fair to point out that in addition to the additional money that is now going into the core schools budget—and it is going up over £2 billion over the next two years alone—we introduced a pupil premium, which itself is £2.5 billion extra to schools every single year. We are looking at how we can make sure that is effectively spent. We know that there is a difference between how effectively some schools are



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investing their pupil premium compared to others. Using the work of the Education Endowment Fund, we now have a much richer evidence base than ever before to help us make it a race to the top on schools achieving more with the new pupil premium.

Q52 Michelle Donelan: When you say “we are looking at it”, is there going to be a comprehensive review specifically on the pupil premium?

Justine Greening: We are already in the process of understanding how effectively schools are tackling disadvantage, not just in relation to their use of pupil premium but introducing the new funding formula means we will have a much clearer line of sight through to understanding how resources deliver results much more generally. I would say that this is already the bread and butter of what we do as a Department and there is already almost a permanent piece of work underway to look at how we can make sure pupil premium delivers the progress that we want.

Q53 Trudy Harrison: I should declare an interest, Chair, as the co-chair of the Apprenticeship Delivery Board and also an apprenticeship ambassador. I had the joy last week of attending a graduation ceremony for 130 Sellafield apprentices, and in many ways they are excelling in everything we want: 25% of them were women; they have some of the trailblazers on health, physics and nuclear operators. It was a wonderful event. However, in speaking to those 130, none were from the poor performing schools in my constituency and none were from the outlying secondary schools either.

My concern is about how people from rural areas access apprenticeships. I understand that there was evidence provided to the previous Committee that demonstrated accessing apprenticeships in rural areas was difficult. Talk of bus passes, trains, but if there is none of that they would be reliant on their own transport. What is being done to help those young people? If I can add on, we have had a 61% decrease in apprenticeship take-up since the levy was introduced. Why is that and what is being done?

Justine Greening: You are right to highlight that we do want to make sure that access is open to all young people wherever they are. We have talked about BAME access, but you are right to highlight rural areas and there is a lot of work underway to understand which young people are now accessing apprenticeships, as it has expanded up. In relation to the initial stats on the drop, this is what we were expecting in the fact that we knew that when employees finally took over responsibility for spending the money themselves they may well take some time to look at how they wanted to invest that money in apprenticeships.

We are tracking that very closely. We broadly remain on track in relation to 3 million apprenticeships. There has been 1 million since 2015, which is great news. They are genuinely transforming the quality of technical education, the options that young people have, in a way that means that



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for them as they get to be higher level they are starting to significantly compete with the option of going to university.

- Q54 **James Frith:** In Bury, Bury College and Holy Cross in the last three years have lost £2 million in funding. Can you explain the logic behind a difference for post-16 education compared to those in secondary, which is about 21%? The difference is 48% when comparing FE to HE and there is a massive 70% when you compare Holy Cross and Bury College and colleges like them with the independent sector on funding.

Justine Greening: We maintained the per pupil funding levels and guaranteed to do that through the course of this Parliament. The broader point—

- Q55 **James Frith:** That is nearly £1,000 per pupil less than either side. You talk about social mobility, equality of opportunity. These principles are not applied to your funding rationale when in the middle, at a very important time in a young person's life, you turn your back essentially on £1,000 per pupil compared to that at secondary, primary and higher education. Why is that when there is, at least in your performance, a commitment to social mobility and technical vocation and apprenticeships? The money is not there; you are not putting the money in where the statements are.

Justine Greening: I do not agree with that. The last budget—

James Frith: £2 million, £1.3 million from Bury College, which is the apprenticeship provider college of choice, and £600,000 from Holy Cross, which is a more academic college. Perhaps that is your alternative fact or alternative reality; that is the reality that colleges and students in Bury are faced with and it is inconsistent with how you apply funding to the sectors either side of post-16.

Chair: You must let the Secretary of State answer.

Justine Greening: The point I was going to make was you are talking about today and what I was trying to say was that at the Budget earlier this year we announced significantly more investment going into further education, reforms that would increase the hours of learning by over 50% for young people, more work placements. We brought forward a Strategic College Improvement Fund. We are introducing the concept of national leaders in further education, which in the broader school system has done a massive job to help raise standards.

This year alone we have committed over £11 million to support the FE teaching profession. I want to look at what more we can do in relation to basic skills. For those young people who come out of secondary school, not with GCSEs, particularly maths and English, we want to make sure the FE sector is excellent in getting them through those qualifications when they resit them. I agree that there does need to be more investment going in, and that is what we have announced, but alongside that, the other key thing that is going to make a big difference, is broader



reform in relation to technical education, T levels, the need for employers to step up to the plate and give us work placements. We have a skill summit at the end of next month where we will be bringing all these employees into the DfE to talk to them about how we do that.

- Q56 **James Frith:** Two questions on technical. Have you specified to the Chancellor an amount that you would like per student for post-16 education to be raised by in preparation for T levels? Can we have a bit more information about T levels, particularly where students might be able to mix aspects of both pathways? In preparation for that, will you allow for a Progress 8 bucket to be filled with a technical or music qualification in advance of pursuit of a T level?

Justine Greening: Obviously I am not going to go into the Budget bids or otherwise I make to the Chancellor, but you saw the outcome of the one I did earlier in the year that was highly successful. I do feel that we are now underway on a proper strategy for reforming technical education; the CBI called it a breakthrough budget on skills. Robert and I at the time—in your previous role—were delighted to get this underway. We need to continue to look at the investment that the sector needs to make sure it is ready to deliver these T levels successfully.

On Progress 8, the accountability system is important. We do not have any plans to change Progress 8 at the moment. It is still new. The most important thing is that we get on with introducing high quality T levels and that we work with business on one plan to do that successfully.

- Q57 **Thelma Walker:** The recruitment and retention of teachers is at crisis point. Does the Secretary of State have data to show the figures for recruitment and retention and the difference, if there is any, between recruitment in affluent areas and areas of deprivation?

Chair: Please say yes or no to that.

Justine Greening: I do not have the regional split with me. There are now more teachers than ever before in our profession and the number of former teachers coming back has also gone up.

Chair: But are you doing the data to compare recruitment in affluent—

Justine Greening: I do not have the data on me. We will look to see—

Thelma Walker: Will that be shared with the Committee?

Ian Mearns: Just on teacher retention and recruitment, can I recommend to you the NFER report that was published yesterday?

Chair: Good recommendation.

- Q58 **Michelle Donelan:** Are we still expecting the career strategy in autumn? You mentioned in July that it would involve much more focus on social mobility and technology. Will it also involve more focus on linking with the labour market so that we can encourage young people to go into careers to deal with the skills gap rather than just inform them, for



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example STEM and so on.

Justine Greening: The short answer to that is yes.

- Q59 **Chair:** Good. Great answer, short and to the point. Just to confirm, the manifesto commitment did say we would be helping apprentices with their travel costs. I just want to be clear that that is happening. A yes or no.

Justine Greening: We are looking at taking forward the manifesto in a range of areas.

- Q60 **Chair:** The David Lammy work on Oxbridge is quite important. One can have a different look at the reasons. You might say it is the school's fault; you might say it is the university's fault; it is a mixture of both. But clearly it demonstrates a huge amount of social disadvantage in our elite universities and is very different compared to elite universities overseas. Do you recognise this? Are you going to do something about it or as much as possible?

Justine Greening: On the Oxbridge piece in particular, they are taking more young people from state schools than ever before. I am not sure whether that is as widely known as it should be. It is something like 59% from memory. We have to make sure that young people who are capable of applying and are getting the grades are making sure they do apply to go to Oxbridge. There lots of other barriers that often young people feel they may have that might put them off. That means mentoring on the ground. The access and participation work that universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, are doing are bearing fruit. But it is why all of the other things we have talked about previously matter so much because in the end it is about getting attainment at the end of GCSEs and A levels that opens up those opportunities.

Chair: Although the figures show variation.

Justine Greening: Can I give you a statistic, which is a positive one? Yes, there is a long way to go but the number of young people from disadvantaged families getting into those most selective universities of Russell Group has gone up by 52%. There are more young people from those backgrounds getting in but we need to see it go further.

- Q61 **Mr William Wragg:** At a pace we move on to the highly sensitive issue of higher education. We will, as a Committee, be looking at the value for money in higher education and the Treasury Committee is looking into the Student Loans Company. Just some headline questions on that. The Prime Minister announced a major review at the party conference. When will that review start and who will be conducting it?

Justine Greening: This will be something that the DfE leads. We set out some initial steps in relation to student finance in particular. What we want to do is recognise that there is significant change already in the pipeline for universities following the passage of the Higher Education Research Bill. That will mean our young people are much better able to



look at the outcomes for the investments that they are being asked to make. It will mean a bit more competition but it sits alongside more choice in the future in relation to technical education than has ever been there before. We want to look at that in the round and we want to continue to look at the student financing system to make sure that it remains there.

Q62 Mr William Wragg: Do you think students are getting value for money, particularly with reference to the labour market outcomes for their degrees?

Justine Greening: If you look overall at what students think themselves, we have never had more young people at 18 applying, more young disadvantaged people as well. We know that it does raise income levels over the course of a person's working life. The key to this for me is transparency and the role of the officer students in having universities more clearly show—as you get if you look at doing an MBA—what your earnings power is, not just from that overall university but from that particular course especially. That is the data that will put pressure on fees, because students will simply decide whether or not they think something is value for money. I have also said value for money goes beyond that.

It is, of course, about the broader offer that universities have for our young people and the experience that they are getting at universities. I want to see more universities tackling the kind of point that Michelle just made about careers and partnerships that they should be developing with employers, so that there is more of a streamlined career progression from degrees into work.

Q63 Mr William Wragg: That is certainly what our inquiry will focus on, the wider experience of students at universities, and perhaps leave it to the bean counters on the Treasury Committee to look at the nitty-gritty of the loan system. A freeze on fees has been announced but one of the most contentious issues, as you will be aware, is the rate of the interest thereafter. Has the DfE given any consideration to that matter?

Justine Greening: The change that we made in relation to the repayment threshold at its heart was about taking out some regressiveness that had crept into the system with the threshold effectively being fixed. In relation to interest rates, that was originally put in as a piece of policy architecture to be a progressive measure because the young people, the graduates who will pay the 6.1%, are the ones that are the richest, the highest earning and it allowed the interest rate on the lower earning graduates to be lower. It was a progressive measure but it is important that we look to see whether that is the case and, for me, it is important that we have an approach on student finance that is progressive for students and graduates but also progressive more generally for young people.

Q64 Chair: The rate is four points higher than the Bank of England base rate.



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People start paying over £21,000 but the interest rate is the same for everybody and we are much higher than other countries. Just to confirm you are reviewing that.

Justine Greening: The rate progressively goes up to the 6.1% or the RPI plus 3% That is how it currently works.

Chair: It is still much higher than many other countries.

Justine Greening: The rationale behind how the interest rate would work was in order to reduce the interest rate for the lowest earning graduates and that was a policy choice that was made. It is important that we look across these things to make sure that they are working as intended. The issue for me is a question of fairness.

Chair: Thank you, Secretary of State. It was very comprehensive. We have covered an enormous number of subjects and appreciate your responses. As this is the first session of the new Committee, we very much welcome you back in the new year and look forward to working with you over the months ahead.