

Education Committee

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

Tuesday 22 May 2018

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

Questions 958 - 1072

Witness

[I](#): Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister for School Standards, Department for Education

Examination of witnesses

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister for School Standards, Department for Education

Q958 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming. It has only been a short time since your last visit here. In terms of the first major announcement by the Education Secretary, why were existing grammar schools given priority?

Nick Gibb: His first real priority was to talk about workload. His first major speech was to the NAHT. What he conveyed there was his understanding of some of the pressures on the teaching profession, and addressing those workload issues really was his first major pronouncement in terms of policy direction. We do take the issue of workload in the teaching profession very seriously. In terms of the response to the "Schools that Work for Everyone" Green Paper, that was overdue and we needed to respond to it. We had to respond to it before we were able to launch the next wave of the free school programme. That is really why it became an urgent priority to respond to that document.

Q959 **Chair:** Given that just 3% of pupils in grammar schools are eligible for free school meals, why did you give the existing grammar schools the carrot in advance of having more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds rather than say, "You need to make dramatic reform first and have many more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds"—rather than giving them a reward if they get a few thousand more deprived pupils afterwards?

Nick Gibb: We need to expand the number of school places. Since 2010 we have created 825,000 new school places to deal with the increasing population and the increasing birth rate that happened at the turn of the century. That continues into secondary, so we need more secondary school places. We are spending £1 billion a year on creating new school places. This is £50 million—

Chair: It is £240 million.

Nick Gibb: Over a period, but in terms of 2018-19 it is £50 million. We could have just left that £50 million in the same pot that allows any good school to expand to deal with the need for more school places. That was the case going back to 2010 and it was the case before 2010. Grammar schools had been expanding before the Coalition came into power in 2010, and they have been expanding since. What we decided to do instead was to have a separate pot for selective schools, grammar schools—

Chair: In essence, what you are doing—

Nick Gibb: Hang on, let me just make this important point, Mr Halfon. We wanted to apply conditions to being able to expand. We would not have been able to apply those conditions had we left the funding in the general £1 billion pot.



Q960 Chair: You are already helping the “haves”. You are passionate about standards and many of us are passionate about standards, but with that £240 million you could have offered means-tested vouchers to low-income parents to spend on one-to-one tuition. There is evidence from the Education Endowment Foundation that you can dramatically improve a pupil’s performance by having extra tuition. They have suggested, “A typical effective programme might involve 30 minutes’ tuition, five times a week, for 12 weeks. This would require about four full days of a teacher’s time, which is estimated to cost approximately £700 per pupil.” It would cost £200 million but reach 285,714 pupils. Under your proposals, even if they do have more pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, you will only reach a few thousand. Surely this would have been a better way to spend that £200 million.

Nick Gibb: That money would have to have been spent on creating new school places. This is capital spending, not revenue spending. We need to create those new school places, whether they are new schools or an expanded good school. If we were not spending it on selective schools separately, it would have to go into creating more school places in comprehensive schools. We need more school places, whether they are grammar school places or secondary school places. It is not an issue that if we did not spend the £50 million on expanding grammar schools, we would not expand any other school instead and we could use it for revenue.

In terms of those particular issues you raise, we have built into the national funding formula—which is about revenue funding of schools—extra money for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and for pupils who are living in poorer IDACI areas. We have the pupil premium on top of that, £1,300 per pupil for primary and nearly £1,000 per pupil eligible for free school meals for secondary. Those are funds that are designed to pay for the sorts of projects that you are talking about.

Q961 Chair: Members will have different views—I am not against grammar schools at all, and I believe in parental choice—but it will still benefit the more leafy areas that tend to have grammar schools rather than those in disadvantaged areas around the country. The Secretary of State’s predecessor took £420 million from the capital budget for building repairs to raise the £1.3 billion that she raised for core funding. It may have been allocated capital funding, but there is no reason why you could not have different priorities and say, “Our priority is to address social injustice. We want to improve standards for everybody. Rather than spending capital on helping existing grammar schools when they have a very poor record in terms of free school meal pupils, what we will do is spend that £200 million on a number of other things”. As I have suggested, you could hugely benefit 285,000-plus pupils, giving them mentoring, improving their life chances and improving their chances of getting good GCSEs.

Nick Gibb: We made it a very clear condition that any grammar school that wishes to expand first of all has to demonstrate that there is a need



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for secondary school places and, secondly, they have to demonstrate how they are going to increase the intake of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The way the King Edward VI Foundation schools in Birmingham were able to increase their proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds was by expanding.

Q962 **Chair:** How many more disadvantaged pupils will this policy of expansion help? How many more do you expect?

Nick Gibb: I do not know, but we are making—

Q963 **Chair:** It will be just a few thousand?

Nick Gibb: Yes, because that is—

Q964 **Chair:** I have suggested another way that you could transform the GCSE chances, something which—

Nick Gibb: Yes, but those things are funded by revenue expenditure.

Chair: That is a decision that you guys have made. You could change that.

Nick Gibb: Yes, but I do not think we can go any further in converting capital to revenue. We did that because we wanted to get more money to the front line, the £1.3 billion extra funding for schools that we introduced. I do not think we can go any further than that because we do need to create those extra school places.

One of the things we inherited in 2010 was this school places problem. I do not want to be party political in this forum, but the previous Government had actually eliminated 100,000 school places in that Parliament. We knew there was this increasing birth rate, so we urgently had to double the amount of capital for creating new school places. We did that—800,000 new school places. This now is filtering through into the secondary sector, so we do need that capital to create more school places in the secondary sector. Whether that is grammar schools or comprehensive, it does not matter, but the reason why we separated it out was because we wanted to apply these conditions about having a fair access plan to show how you can get more children from disadvantaged backgrounds into those grammar schools. What we do know about grammar schools is that they almost eliminate the attainment gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The problem is getting more into them; I agree with you.

Q965 **Chair:** I do not dispute that. What I do dispute is that you are giving them a reward when the actual free school meal pupils are very low. What you should have done is say, "You should increase the number of free school meals in your schools substantially and then we will consider giving you capital funding".

Nick Gibb: Yes, except that one of the best and easiest ways to increase the proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds into your



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grammar school is to expand. That is what the King Edward VI Foundation schools did. In order to deliver that locally and to have the support of the community locally, they expanded the schools. That has meant that something like 21% of the cohort in the year 7 admission in 2017 now come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Q966 **Chair:** Do you not accept that it is a policy that is just going to help a few thousand children—I am not against that—when there are a number of options you could have done to raise the attainment of hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable with £240 million? This is against a backdrop where some schools in disadvantaged areas do not have the money they need for capital funding. It just looks like a strange priority, to give to those who already have quite a lot of advantages rather than helping the most disadvantaged and addressing social injustice.

Nick Gibb: All I am saying is that the £50 million, if we did not have a separate selective school expansion fund, would be in the general expansion fund to which any school is entitled to apply, including grammar schools.

Q967 **Chair:** Why do we do it like that then? Why do you want to give them special treatment?

Nick Gibb: Because then it would be more difficult to apply conditions to the grammar schools. We do not apply any of these conditions to comprehensive schools. The only condition we apply to comprehensive schools is that they have to demonstrate that there is a need for new school places. If we wanted to apply additional conditions to selective schools in securing capital funding to expand, we would have to separate it out into a separate fund. That is what we have done to enable us to say that we will prioritise those bids where they can demonstrate a fair access plan to get more children from disadvantaged backgrounds into those schools, whether that is by outreach work to the primary schools or whether it is having a different pass mark for the entrance exam for those schools. They need to demonstrate how effectively they are going to increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils.

We take this issue extremely seriously. We agree with the premise, Mr Halfon, of what you are saying about getting more disadvantaged children into those schools. We do know that once they are in those schools the attainment gap is closed. The problem is that they have a smaller proportion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds attending those schools and this will help address that issue.

Q968 **Chair:** Given the figure is so low I am not clear why—

Nick Gibb: It is low because there are only 163 grammar schools. We are only allocating £50 million to this fund compared to the £1 billion in 2018-19.

Q969 **Chair:** It is £240 million in total, which is a big whack of money.



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Nick Gibb: In one year, in 2018-19. We have not said what is happening in the next few years.

Q970 **Chair:** I want to understand finally, before I pass to my colleague, whether or not when you do these things you do an impact assessment and think, "How does this impact on social justice? How can we make sure that we reach the most disadvantaged pupils to make sure they have a level playing field in terms of the standard?" With other options, you could have reached hundreds of thousands of pupils; this one just reaches a few thousand. Surely it would have been better to develop a policy, whether it is the suggestion I have given in terms of extra tuition or a range of other options, rather than just give to those who are in pretty well-off areas already that have not shown much progress in terms of only 3% on free school meals.

Nick Gibb: On the issue of showing progress already, this is an issue we did address when we were devising the policy, about whether they should have to have a high proportion of disadvantaged children attending already. The problem with that is we want the schools who do not have a high proportion of disadvantaged children to do more to encourage disadvantaged children to attend them. It is better to say, "We do not mind what your starting point is because those are the facts of today. What we want is for you to demonstrate what you are going to do in the future." We did not want to prioritise schools that already had a high proportion of disadvantaged children attending them.

Q971 **Chair:** How many students from disadvantaged backgrounds will these grammar schools be expected to have each?

Nick Gibb: We are not setting targets, but all I am saying—

Q972 **Chair:** How will you judge that is working? You are giving them this money; how will you judge it?

Nick Gibb: We will judge it by the quality of the proposals they put forward. Those that have the best proposals to increase the proportion of disadvantaged pupils will be the ones that receive the highest points when they bid for this funding. There is a lot of competition for this funding from the grammar school sector.

In addition to this, of course, there is the memorandum of understanding with the Grammar School Heads Association about what more they can do as a sector, with their expertise in academic education, to help other schools and to help improve schools, primary and secondary, in the area. Now as a sector—they are willing to do this as a sector, even though it is very small—they have to do more to use their expertise more widely across other schools in a particular area.

Q973 **Ian Mearns:** I am not on this Committee to represent my constituency; I am here to talk about education in the round. However, as a north-east MP representing a constituency like Gateshead, I am forced to ask the question: in round figures how many children in the north-east of



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England will this policy benefit?

Nick Gibb: As I have said, there is £1 billion a year being spent on expansion. That will apply in the north-east as elsewhere.

Q974 **Ian Mearns:** There is £240 million over four years being earmarked for expansion of grammar schools. It is that element of the policy I am honing in on. I want to know how many children in the north-east of England from disadvantaged backgrounds, in round figures, this will benefit.

Nick Gibb: As I have said, the £50 million could have been left in the pot of £1,000 million.

Q975 **Ian Mearns:** Would the figure “nil” be appropriate?

Nick Gibb: I do not know what the figure is for the number of grammar schools in what you define as the north-east.

Ian Mearns: The Government knows what the north-east is, Minister. It is the counties of Northumberland, Durham, Tees Valley, and Tyne and Wear. That is the north-east of England.

Nick Gibb: There are very few grammar schools in the whole country. There are only 163. There are over 3,000 secondary schools in the whole country. We are talking about a very small number of schools. As I have said repeatedly in answer to these questions, we could have put the £50 million in with the £1,000 million we are spending in 2018-19 as a general expansion fund. We need secondary schools right across the system to expand, including in the north-east, to deal with the increasing secondary school population that is coming through, but we separated it out in order to impose conditions on those bids. One of the key conditions is that they do more and show us a plan to increase the proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds attending those schools. Given the experience of the King Edward VI Foundation schools in Birmingham, I believe those plans will be highly successful.

Q976 **Ian Mearns:** But in terms of the grammar school expansion element, the north-east of England will be nil?

Nick Gibb: If it does not have grammar schools in the area you are defining, then, of course, it will be nil. There is £1,000 million being spent across the whole of England, including the north-east, in order to fund capital expansion programmes.

Q977 **Ian Mearns:** Why, Minister, did the Department and yourself decide to announce £50 million when the Treasury has put aside £240 million? Why have you made that distinction? We know how much money is there—£240 million earmarked by the Treasury—so why was the announcement £50 million? Was it to sweeten the pill or something of that nature?

Nick Gibb: No, we felt that was the right figure proportionately compared with the overall expansion money we are applying for capital funding.



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Q978 **Ian Mearns:** We are trying to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. If there was an amount of revenue available, wouldn't a programme a bit like London Challenge, but for distribution around the rest of the country, be more beneficial?

Nick Gibb: You are talking about different programmes. We have a whole range of programmes designed for school improvement, one of which is—I dread to say it in front of Mr Mearns—the opportunity areas. I know what your next question is going to be.

Ian Mearns: Just rub salt into the wounds, Minister.

Nick Gibb: That is a red rag to a bull. There is a whole raft of policy areas in terms of school improvement that we have introduced. If you look at all our reforms since 2010, they are designed to improve schools. We are improving the reading and maths curriculums in primary schools, and there is the whole structural reform of the academies programme. There are 480,000 pupils today in sponsored academies that are now rated good or outstanding. Those sponsored academies, as you know, have historically been underperforming. It is the academies programme that has delivered a higher quality education to those 480,000 pupils, many of which are in the north and north-east.

Q979 **Ian Mearns:** I have local experience of an academy chain ruining a school in my area, leading to its ultimate closure through very poor management. That has been done by a relatively large academy chain, which is tragic given I was chair of governors at that school for almost 20 years. I had to leave it to do this job and then saw an academy chain take it over and run it into the ground. It is a mixed bag, Minister, from that perspective.

Nick Gibb: There is a small number of academy chains where things have not gone well. Of course, when schools were all run by local authorities there were a very substantial number of schools that were underperforming year after year. What the academies programme has done has meant that schools are improving more rapidly. When we do find things going wrong with an academy chain, the ESFA—the Education and Skills Funding Agency—takes very swift action in dealing with that particular academy chain. If you look at the system as a whole, it has resulted in 1.9 million more pupils today in good or outstanding schools compared to 2010. It has been a very successful programme. It is giving autonomy to the teaching profession, and they are using that autonomy to deliver a higher quality education to our young people.

Q980 **Ian Mearns:** You have identified the £50 million, the £240 million over four years. Where exactly has that money come from? Where have you extracted it from?

Nick Gibb: We are spending a huge amount of money on capital spending. It is something like £23 billion in this spending period on capital funding, whether that is basic need. We have created 800,000 new school places in our system. We have 400 new schools, 400 free



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schools, another 300 schools in the pipeline due to open. We are not shy of spending capital money. Even in a time when we are dealing with a historic budget deficit, we are not shy of spending the appropriate levels of capital on improving the fabric of our school system and also increasing the number of school places that we need to address the increasing population.

Q981 Ian Mearns: I have read this somewhere else, so it is not original. Minister, with the policy you have embarked on with this expansion of existing grammar schools, if you were a Health Minister, you could be accused of building hospitals for the healthy. That is what it looks like.

Nick Gibb: I am sure the health service will spend money on prevention. There are all kinds of things people spend money on. As I have said, we separated this money out from the general fund so we could apply these conditions, and the conditions are about increasing the proportion of disadvantaged children. Grammar schools have been expanding. Even when your party was in power, grammar schools were expanding.

Q982 Ian Mearns: For the schools that expand, what will the target be that the DfE would be expecting in terms of the number of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in their intake?

Nick Gibb: We do not have a target. As I have said, they all have to produce a fair access proposal.

Q983 Ian Mearns: If the figure went from 3% to 4%, would you be happy?

Nick Gibb: I am not going to say what proportion. All I am saying is look at the King Edward VI Foundation and what they have achieved by expanding their schools.

Ian Mearns: That is a particular circumstance.

Nick Gibb: I will give you a figure. They have achieved 21% of their year 7 cohort coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. We are asking any grammar school that bids for this fund to demonstrate how they are going to increase the proportion of disadvantaged children attending their school. We will award points for those bids and the better that proposal, the higher they will score in terms of awarding bids into that fund.

Q984 Ian Mearns: Even if you do not have any targets, surely you must have in your mind a de minimis figure in terms of what the minimum will be that will be acceptable.

Nick Gibb: We certainly expect it to be significantly above what they are achieving at the moment across the sector.

Q985 Ian Mearns: At 3% it would not be difficult, would it?

Nick Gibb: We want it to be a lot higher than that. Given that there is competition for this limited pot, I expect those proposals to be very effective in increasing the proportion coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.



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Q986 **Lucy Allan:** I very quickly want to follow up on something that came out of that exchange. You mentioned the increase in numbers of good and outstanding schools and, of course, that is to be welcomed, but can I ask you how many of those good and outstanding schools are in the most disadvantaged areas, such as areas of my constituency?

Nick Gibb: I am just trying to think how to answer that question.

Lucy Allan: Particularly at secondary level, because that is critical.

Nick Gibb: Yes. I will need to write to the Committee with those figures. We are focusing a lot of other programmes on dealing with those cold spot areas where simply too many schools are underperforming. There is a huge number of programmes to deal with that, and one of them is the opportunity areas programme. These are 12 areas that were identified based on the social mobility index. We tried to get a range of coastal, rural and inner-city areas and then to evaluate the approaches they are taking in terms of improving education and social mobility.

Q987 **Lucy Allan:** Isn't it much easier to achieve good or outstanding schools in areas where children are more affluent and have more input from their families and their home environment? I have schools in my constituency where 75% of children are not getting five good GCSEs. It is very difficult in that context for a school to be good or outstanding.

Nick Gibb: Yes, but this is where we take what could be perceived by some to be a controversial view. We take the view that we expect our school system to be delivering high expectations and high quality education in every area, regardless of the background of the pupils in those areas.

Progress 8 is designed to encourage and incentivise that. Since 2010, £13 billion—£2.5 billion a year—has been spent on the pupil premium programme, which is designed to provide more resources to precisely the areas you are talking about. In addition to that, the national funding formula has within it extra funding for children with additional needs, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to make sure that schools are properly funded to help address the challenges that undoubtedly those schools face. What we are not compromising on is that we expect those schools to deliver for those pupils the same quality of education and the same standards of behaviour as schools in leafier suburbs. That has been a driving force of this Government.

Q988 **Chair:** To follow on quickly from Lucy's point, in the wealthiest quintile of areas, 93% of secondary schools are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted for the quality of teaching. In the most disadvantaged quintile, the figure is 67%. Given what you just said—that you do not want to compromise and everyone should have the same standards—why not spend the £200 million in those disadvantaged areas?

Nick Gibb: Because we are spending a lot more than the £200 million you are talking about—a lot more.



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Q989 **Chair:** The opportunity areas are only in 12 areas of the country and that is £70 million. You could spend £200 million just in areas like the north-east and Telford.

Nick Gibb: We are spending £2.5 billion—that is £2,500 million—on the pupil premium. There is a significant proportion of the national funding formula that is allocated to pupils from a disadvantaged background. We are talking billions of pounds that we are allocating specifically to areas of disadvantage because that has been the driving force of this Government since 2010. To talk about a particular programme, which you say is £240 million, is a tiny drop compared to what we are actually putting in to improve the education system for disadvantaged areas.

Q990 **Chair:** Was this a policy made in Downing Street or did the DfE come along and say, “I know what our first big spending announcement is. We have found £240 million and we are going to spend it in areas that have a lot already rather than giving more to deprived areas”?

Nick Gibb: I am pretty sure it is not the first spending announcement. I do not know when I announced the £96 million for music and the arts—whether that was before or after we responded—but there have been a number of spending announcements since the election.

Chair: This is a pretty big one—£240 million.

Nick Gibb: It is £50 million on this pot compared to the £96 million we are spending on music and the arts.

Chair: It is £240 million.

Nick Gibb: You say that but we have only announced one year, 2018-19. I do not think we said anything about the future years.

Chair: In the House, the Secretary of State confirmed the larger figure because it is over a few years.

Nick Gibb: Yes, but we have not said what is happening in future years, as far as I am aware.

Chair: Unless I have misunderstood, the impression that the Secretary of State gave in the House was that the overall figure was £240 million over a few years.

Nick Gibb: We will have to look at the record.

Q991 **Michelle Donelan:** I wanted to touch on the other thing that was part of that announcement, which was the retention of the cap on free school faith schools and how that decision came about. Obviously, it was contradictory to the Conservative manifesto and was a volte-face and unexpected by a lot of people. Was any consideration given as to whether it should be increased to 75% if it could not be removed completely?

Nick Gibb: It is already part of the integrated community strategy so we decided to retain the 50% cap and not change it. The purpose of the 50%



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cap is to ensure that those free schools—there have been about 70 faith free schools established since the free school programme began—were also geared to be popular with people of other faiths or no faith, not just the faith of a particular free school. There were some faiths, as you know, which felt unable to use that mechanism to establish a new school. That is why we have decided to fund the voluntary aided route for those schools. That has always been available, of course, to schools and to the system, but we are funding that to enable those particular faiths, or indeed any faith, to be able to establish a voluntary aided school.

Q992 Michelle Donelan: Why did the thinking on that change so quickly? There was an alternative view, a few months ago in fact, that was promoted by Government Ministers, and now we seem to have completely done a volte-face. Why did it change? What gave you the impression that it should be completely different as a policy?

Nick Gibb: It is mainly the work of Louise Casey and the integrated community strategy that really confirmed, certainly in my mind, the view that the cap, which we introduced in 2010, was the right policy. The reason why the “Schools that Work for Everyone” Green Paper proposed removing it was because there was this particular issue with the Catholic Education Service, who were saying they could not use the free school route. I think it also applies to some denominations of the Jewish faith as well. They felt they could not use the free school route with the 50% cap. There was a proposal then to remove the cap to help address those concerns. By removing the cap, of course, you then confront the reason why we introduced the cap in the first place, which was to ensure that faith free schools were also open and popular with people of other faiths and no faith. My view, and the Government’s view, is that we wanted to retain it because that argument still prevailed, particularly following the integrated community strategy.

How then do you deal with the Catholic Education Service concerns? There is the voluntary aided route. Of course, any faith that wishes to establish a school through the voluntary aided route has to provide capital. Voluntary aided schools are maintained schools, so they are very much part of the local authority. The local authority would have to be happy that a new faith voluntary aided school fitted in with their integrated community strategy and, of course, they are obliged to follow the national curriculum, which free schools and academies are not.

Q993 Michelle Donelan: Finally, did you not think it would have been sensible to review what level you place the cap? It cannot really be a faith school if it is at 50%. Could you not have looked at whether it should be 70% or 75% rather than shutting down that entire argument? Would that not have been sensible?

Nick Gibb: Obviously, these issues are considered. My understanding is that that would not have satisfied the canon law concerns of the Catholic Education Service, and I do not think it would have satisfied the other faiths that did not feel able to use the free school programme. For those



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particular faiths, it was either 100% or nothing. That is my understanding. I might be wrong.

Q994 **Ian Mearns:** Minister, will you share with the Committee how points will be awarded and how bids will be evaluated? If you cannot do it now, could you let us know what are the criteria used to evaluate the bids?

Nick Gibb: We can certainly send you the detail, but it will be that they have to demonstrate that there is a demand for new places in that area. They will also have to submit a fairer access plan to demonstrate how they will increase the proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, whether that is through outreach work to local primary schools and so on to encourage children to apply, for example, or whether it is also to—

Q995 **Chair:** What increase is that? Is that 10 more, 20 more?

Nick Gibb: You are asking the same questions you asked earlier.

Chair: There must be some conditionality, surely. Otherwise they could just have five more pupils, and they may have passed your access agreement.

Nick Gibb: These bids will be scored. There will be more bids than there will be capital available, I am sure; there is a lot of pent-up demand by grammar schools that wish to expand. The schools that submit bids for the best fair access proposals will be those that secure the funding for the expansion. I am very confident that those plans will result in high proportions of children from disadvantaged backgrounds attending those schools. It might be lowering the entrance percentage mark in the entrance exam. It might be enabling local parents to be able to see previous versions of the test, helping parents prepare their children for the exam, and so on.

Q996 **Thelma Walker:** Thinking about the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and others, and the north-south divide in particular, could I refer you to the Children's Commissioner's report, "Growing Up North", which came out earlier this year? The Commissioner wrote that "a disproportionate number of children in the North are growing up in communities of entrenched disadvantage which have not enjoyed the financial growth or government energy and spotlight that have so boosted opportunities in other areas of the country—London and the South East in particular." How are your current reforms and policies going to address the north-south divide and that entrenched disadvantage?

Nick Gibb: Do not underestimate what has been achieved to date. There are something like 400,000 more children in good or outstanding schools in the north compared to 2010. That is 400,000 children in the north getting a better education because of our reforms. Something like 87% of schools in the north are now rated good or outstanding. That is up 17 percentage points. We know, of course, that there is more to do. Pupil attainment and progress is lower in the north than the south.



Q997 **Thelma Walker:** More than half the secondary schools serving the north's most deprived communities are currently judged to be less than good. How directly are your reforms going to impact positively on that situation?

Nick Gibb: That is true but all our national reforms are designed to improve the quality of education, particularly those schools that have historically been underperforming. That is what the academies programme is all about. We are spending more money. The problem we have with the north is that we have fewer successful multi-academy trusts. There is a fund, the multi-academy trust development fund, to encourage and incentivise the creation of new multi-academy trusts in the north. MATs are very successful in dealing with underperforming schools and helping them to improve.

Q998 **Thelma Walker:** Would you accept what this report highlights, that historically there has not been that Government spotlight in terms of funding or support?

Nick Gibb: The thrust of policy from 2010 until after the 2015 election was national. We wanted to deal with all these issues on a national basis. The reform of the primary curriculum, improving the way children are taught to read, improving behaviour in schools, rewriting the primary national curriculum, the reforms to GCSE—they are all national issues and they were beginning to show success leading up to the 2015 election. We have seen some very marked signs of success since, such as England rising up through the PIRLS international tables for nine year-olds' reading, and having the highest ever score in those tests.

However, we then identified, of course, that there were too many areas of the country, as you have identified, that were not improving at the same rate as other parts of the country, the cold spot areas. That is why we introduced the opportunity area programme. I know it does not cover every part of England, but the programme is designed to enable us to learn how you improve social mobility in those areas and then we can spread that more nationally. We are also spending money. For example, there is a £30 million three-year tailored support programme designed to address teacher retention and recruitment in areas that have struggled to recruit good teachers. Something like 150 schools in the north will benefit from that programme.

Q999 **Thelma Walker:** I would suggest that the cuts to early help funding are going to deepen this entrenched disadvantage. What are your thoughts on the cuts to front-line services and early help?

Nick Gibb: We are dealing with historic deficits. We have had to be careful with revenue spending right across Whitehall but, in terms of education, we have protected school funding in real terms across the system. We are determined to make sure that that money is spent in the most effective way and that is what our reforms have been about. Do not underestimate how successful they have been so far. An additional 1.9



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million pupils in good or outstanding schools, including 400,000 pupils in the north, have benefited from our structural reforms, and we will continue that. We are continuing to improve reading.

Q1000 James Frith: That was Lucy Allan's point. You did not know how many of those children were in the most disadvantaged areas, so that could just be a demographic increase that you are able to talk up the benefits of without the system being designed by it, particularly as you sit here able to recite that fact without being able to point to where the disadvantage is.

Nick Gibb: Let me cite some other facts then that demonstrate this. Let's take, for example, the proportion of pupils being entered for the EBacc. This is a combination of GCSEs that enables young people's opportunities to be kept wider. In 2010, 8.6% of disadvantaged pupils were entered for the EBacc, compared with 25% of more advantaged pupils. Today, that 8% is 25% and that 25.7% of all other pupils is 43%. We are focusing our efforts on everybody, but also making sure the most disadvantaged pupils gain the quality of education that their more advantaged peers are getting.

Q1001 Thelma Walker: At this rate of progress, this report suggests that it would take 50 years to reach equitable education. What I am suggesting is that it is because the north has not had that spotlight in terms of funding and support from the Government that we have this entrenched disadvantage situation.

Nick Gibb: With regard to funding, of course all schools, even before the national funding formula, are funded on the same basis. All local authorities were funded on the same basis, albeit based on out of date data, which is something we had to address. We have updated that data. Now all areas are funded according to more accurate data—for example, the free school meal data—and are funded on a fairer basis. The new national funding formula is a far fairer method of funding than was used previously. We are spending record amounts of money on school funding; £42.4 billion this year, going to £43.5 billion next year. These are record amounts of school funding and they have been retained in real terms. On top of all that, we have been reforming our education system to address all the issues, or as many of the issues as we can cope with, that have led to schools underperforming.

Q1002 Emma Hardy: In my constituency, like many others, one in three children is now living in poverty. One of the most obvious and distressing manifestations of this is that children from these households are coming to school malnourished and often hungry. This obviously has a negative impact not only on the physical health and wellbeing of these children, but it impairs learning by reducing their ability to concentrate. Almost half of the respondents to the NEU survey stated that their school directly provides one or more anti-poverty services, such as food clubs, food or clothing banks, free or subsidised family meals and, in a small number of cases, emergency loans to families. Do you think that the school



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accountability system fairly reflects the work that these schools do with our most disadvantaged children?

Nick Gibb: We take very seriously the quality of education that children from disadvantaged backgrounds receive. We expect schools, and are reforming the system to enable schools, to provide high quality education to every child in our system, including, and particularly including, children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We introduced a pupil premium in 2010—these are very significant sums of money—at a time when we were trying to deal with the historic budget deficit of £150 billion. We allocated £2.5 billion a year to pupil premium funding.

Q1003 **Emma Hardy:** With respect, the question was about the accountability, not about the funding. Do you think that the school accountability system fairly reflects the work that these schools do with our most disadvantaged children?

Nick Gibb: Yes, I do. The five or more GCSE figure, which is a flat attainment figure, was not, I think, as nuanced and as effective as it could have been, which is why we introduced the Progress 8 figure. The Progress 8 figure rewards schools for getting grades E to D in GCSE, or a grade 3 to 4, or a 2 to 3, and it rewards schools for getting the top grades, A to A*, B to A, an 8 to 9, and I think that is a fairer way of judging a school than simply measuring the absolute level of attainment, which of course is more challenging in areas of more disadvantage.

Q1004 **Emma Hardy:** The Government talk, and you yourself have spoken, of tough choices that schools have to make—that there is just so much funding for schools and where does that funding go. Do you think it is fair that there are CEOs of multi-academy trusts getting paid in excess of £100,000 at a time when we have a situation where schools are having to provide anti-poverty things for pupils in their schools? Do you think that is a fair distribution of money in the school system?

Nick Gibb: I share your concern. I am trying to find the actual figures. Only something like 4% of academy trusts have anybody earning over £150,000. I will get the figures.

Ian Mearns: The 2016 figure was that 150 academy trusts were paying salaries of over £150,000.

Q1005 **Emma Hardy:** I know there was a reduction in the number paying two or more people in excess of £100,000, but the point I want to make, Minister, is whether you agree that that is fair when you have schools providing food clubs, food and clothing banks, free or subsidised family meals. Do you think it is fair that so much money is going to CEOs of multi-academy trusts? I put to you a suggestion that would make it fairer. Do you not think there should be some kind of ratio for CEOs of multi-academy trusts that limits their pay based on the number of pupils they have, the number of schools they have—some kind of fair and transparent system? To my mind, this is our money, taxpayers' money, Government money, going to CEOs of multi-academy trusts and not



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going to children who are coming to our schools malnourished and hungry.

Nick Gibb: I am not unsympathetic to the points you are raising. We want the best people running our multi-academy trusts and some of the best multi-academy trusts are having a dramatic impact, improving the quality of education for children who historically have been served by underperforming schools, decade after decade. I have to say this: only 4% of academy trusts are reporting paying anyone over £150,000. My colleague Lord Agnew has written to multi-academy trusts asking them to justify pay above that figure, which I think is right. We do take these issues very seriously. The Education and Skills Funding Agency monitors the financial probity of academy trusts extremely closely and I know that Lord Agnew takes value for money extremely seriously, not just in terms of pay but in other ways that academy trusts spend taxpayers' money.

Q1006 **Emma Hardy:** Okay, but do you not accept as well that if they are taking more money from the system, it is therefore harder for schools to provide these anti-poverty services?

Nick Gibb: I do not disagree with you. Your question is tricky because I am sympathetic to what you are saying, but what I am saying is that we do want the best people, so it is a balance, getting the best people to take on these very responsible jobs, running 20 to 30 schools, making sure that they are delivering a high quality of education. However, as you say, and I agree with you, this is taxpayers' money, and if trusts are paying above this figure—only 4% of academy trusts are paying one or more person above that figure—they do need to be able to justify it. If this Committee is going to recommend policy in this area, we will look at that very seriously and will consider it.

Q1007 **Emma Hardy:** That is what I would like to put to you, Minister, that you would look at developing a system that is much fairer, that is much more transparent, and that stops what I consider to be a completely unacceptable level of pay when we have children who desperately need that extra funding. Even though I accept the point you make that education outcomes for disadvantaged children can be impacted by schools, we cannot ignore the other factors that are entrenching disadvantage. Therefore, it seems obscene that we are giving the money to people, CEOs of these academy trusts, when we have so many children who are not benefiting from it. I would ask that you would go away and look at whether or not you can concretely limit it, based on a fair system, to something like the number of children or the number of schools.

Nick Gibb: We are looking at this area—I will say that—because we do want to make sure that we are securing best value for the taxpayers at the same time as giving academies the freedoms that they do have over pay to ensure that they can recruit the best people into their schools and into their multi-academy trusts. It is an area of policy that we are



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keeping under review, but you need to remember that we need to get those best people working in our schools.

Q1008 Thelma Walker: To continue that theme of “best people”, could I suggest to you that, to my mind, the best person to be a leader of any school would be the person that had the moral purpose and social conscience enough to not take a huge salary and to make sure that money was diverted to the most vulnerable children?

Nick Gibb: I do not disagree with what you are saying.

Q1009 Chair: Going back to clarify the figure you gave of 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools, are you able to give the figure of how many of those pupils are from deprived backgrounds or free school meal backgrounds?

Nick Gibb: That should be possible because that figure is calculated on the basis of the numbers of pupils in the schools that we know have gone from requires improvement or special measures to become good or outstanding in the period 2010 to date. We will know which schools we are talking about and, therefore, we will know the proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds in those schools. We should be able to give you that figure, not right now, but we can certainly send it to you.

Q1010 Chair: Before I pass on to my colleagues and going back to the attainment gap, disadvantaged pupils are on average four months behind at the end of reception year, 11 months behind at the end of primary school, and 19 months behind at key stage 4. The Social Mobility Commission said that if you carry on at the current level of progress—not denying that progress has happened—it will take 40 years before the attainment gap between disadvantaged five-year-olds and their better-off peers is closed, that there is very little prospect of closing the gap between disadvantaged and wealthy pupils at GCSE taking A level, and in higher education it will take more than 80 years to close the participation gap between disadvantaged students and those from more advantaged areas. Would it not be fair to say that the pace of progress is incremental, rather than transformational, and should not the priority of the Government, in terms of education, be to turn things around now so that this level of attainment is speeded up more quickly?

Nick Gibb: If these issues were easy, they would have been done by previous Governments in previous generations. This has been the driving force of everything we have done since 2010. All our policies are geared towards this, everything we do. That is why we introduced phonics for reading; it is why we changed the maths curriculum; it is why we are rolling out maths mastery. Maths mastery is about every child in the classroom in a primary school having the same curriculum, rather than having different tables where we know that the blue table is for children who will not be learning this particular part of the maths curriculum. Under maths mastery, all children, in whole-class teaching, will have the same curriculum. This is how they teach in south-east Asia. We are



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rolling that out right across the system to half of all primary schools by the end of this Parliament.

These are not easy tasks but we are absolutely determined to deliver precisely what you are saying. We also published our action plan, "Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential", which is about social mobility, at the end of 2017. That is about, for example, closing the word gap in those early years. This is a key thing for the vocabulary of young children. It is absolutely key to their prospects. Getting reading right not only affects their chances of doing well in English at the end of primary school and at GCSE but also affects their maths ability, more so, in fact, than their English ability. We are absolutely determined. The attainment gap has closed by 10% in both primary school and secondary school since 2011, so we have achieved—

Q1011 Chair: I acknowledge that there has been progress, but it is incremental.

Nick Gibb: But do not forget how long these reforms take. We came into office in 2010. We then started work immediately on the curriculum—

Q1012 Chair: Do you agree with the Social Mobility Commissioner that it will take 40 years before the attainment gap between disadvantaged five-year-olds, for example, and their better-off peers is closed?

Nick Gibb: We are more ambitious than that. We have put in place policies and the funding with the pupil premium and the way the national funding formula is geared towards children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We think both those issues, particularly the policies, are geared to do exactly this. Reading is so fundamental to everything that you are talking about. We have to get children mastering the basics of being able to read in those first years of primary school. In 2012 we introduced the phonic check, and 58% passed that check. Today it is 81%. That is 150,000 more six-year-olds every year reading more effectively than they otherwise would have been doing.

Q1013 Chair: The Social Mobility Commissioner also suggested that the Government set themselves the objective of narrowing the attainment gap at key stage 4 by two thirds within the next decade, so you would bring the rest of the country in line with what happens in London. Do you have any plans, as a Department, to accelerate that current rate of progress? Do you agree with that? That is what has been suggested. Are the Government intending to do that?

Nick Gibb: Doing what? Could you repeat that?

Chair: The Social Mobility Commission suggested in their report that the Government set themselves an objective of narrowing the attainment gap at key stage 4 by two thirds within the next decade, bringing the rest of the country in line with London.

Nick Gibb: Do you think that just by passing a rule, or a target, that will be delivered?



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Chair: I am asking you if it is a similar goal for the Government.

Nick Gibb: Of course, or more.

Q1014 **Chair:** Can it be done? What are you doing to achieve it?

Nick Gibb: Everything we are doing is about that. The changes to maths teaching in primary schools, the new curriculum, the maths mastery policy, the 35 maths hubs around the country, which is about spreading best practice, are all about improving maths in primary schools, and the other reforms are about improving English and reading fluency in primary schools, so that when children start secondary school they are in a much better position to tackle the challenges of the secondary curriculum, which then leads into the GCSE. It takes time. We came into office in 2010. The new primary curriculum became law in 2014. The new SATs came in in 2016. The new GCSEs started to be taught in English and maths in 2015, other subjects in 2016, and so on. These things do take time to implement, but I am very confident that those reforms are the right reforms to deliver the Social Mobility Commission's objective that you are talking about.

What I was about to say was that last night the Prime Minister hosted a reception in Downing Street for the teaching profession. There were a large number of teachers at that reception, and the Prime Minister said thank you to the profession for what has been achieved and what it does day in, day out to improve children's lives. I met a head teacher who said that he has noticed very significant improvements in children coming into the secondary school in year 7, particularly in terms of their grammar and punctuation, as a consequence of our reforms. They have had to, therefore, adapt their own English curriculum at secondary level to take that into account and to raise expectations and standards.

The PIRLS test was a very significant international study of nine-year-olds' reading. They were tested in 2016. The results came out in 2017 and they showed that the nine-year-olds in England who took part in the test had the highest ever scores since the PIRLS study was introduced. That is directly attributable, according to the report, to the reforms to the teaching of reading in our primary schools that we introduced. I am convinced that the reforms that we have put in place, which will take time to feed right through to GCSE, will achieve exactly the objective of closing that attainment gap at GCSE even further than the 10% that it has already been closed by.

Q1015 **Mr William Wragg:** You are quite right to highlight that there have been more announcements than that on the grammar school policy; there is the strategy on recruitment and retention, looking at accountability, and introducing no new tests for assessment. With regard to one of the policies, in relation to improving retention and recruitment, that of the sabbatical year, is it not a bit odd to have to offer an escape route to keep people in the profession?



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Nick Gibb: It is not an escape route because it is for a limited period of time and it is the kind of approach other professions might have after, say, 10 years in the profession, taking a period out to go and research an area of education policy or to gain some experience that will improve their practice when they come back into school.

It is not about providing an escape route. It is one small element of a policy that is first about raising the status of the teaching profession. It is a wonderful profession to work in and hugely important in terms of its social value to our country. We are addressing things like workload, particularly the unnecessary workload, the things that teachers think they are required to do that they are not required to do in other OECD countries. That is why teachers in our country are working eight hours a week longer than the OECD average, yet the teaching hours are the same as the OECD average. What is happening in those other eight hours that is not leading to higher standards? We are addressing those issues, such as dialogic marking, unnecessary data collection, the inefficient methods of having to do written lesson plans, and so on. We are working very hard with Ofsted and with the unions and we have had review reports led by experienced head teachers into those three areas. We are now messaging very clearly that those things that are unnecessary should not be done.

Q1016 Mr William Wragg: What do you have to say to the National Audit Office report from September 2017 that said that despite those measures it is still difficult for the Department to measure its success in that area? The NAO said that the Department “cannot demonstrate that its efforts to improve teacher retention and quality are having a positive impact and are value for money”.

Nick Gibb: It is difficult to change the whole culture overnight. For example, on the dialogic marking there is a fear that unless you demonstrate feedback to pupils on the face of the exercise book, Ofsted will mark down that issue when it comes to its report.

Q1017 Mr William Wragg: So a demonstrable example of that would be if you were to direct Ofsted. Is that what you are doing? Are you directing Ofsted to monitor the unnecessary workload of teachers?

Nick Gibb: We do not direct Ofsted. Ofsted is an independent body.

Q1018 Mr William Wragg: You set the parameters, though.

Nick Gibb: They have to have regard to Government policy when they create their frameworks. They are working on the 2019 framework now and we are in discussion, but the framework is their document ultimately.

Q1019 Mr William Wragg: In terms of the 2019 document, are you telling Ofsted—asking, whatever—that they should incorporate this as a key part of that document?



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Nick Gibb: No, we are not. What we are saying is that this is their document and their document needs to have regard to Government policy as a whole. Ofsted's National Director, Education, Sean Harford, is working extremely hard on the communications side. I think it was at the NAHT conference that there was a video with the Secretary of State and Amanda Spielman, the chief inspector, and, I think, one of the union leaders, to make the message about excessive workloads very clear.

Q1020 **Mr William Wragg:** Absolutely, but it is fair to say that Ofsted sets the bar and schools jump in that respect. Would it not be better to give explicit direction that Ofsted should have regard to that? I understand the separation between Ofsted and its operation and Government, but surely in setting its framework that is the ideal opportunity to put this down.

Nick Gibb: We are doing other things rather than that. The other thing is that Ofsted publishes its myth busters document, saying, "These are myths. You do not need to do these things", a whole range of things that have made their way into the ether about what Ofsted requires of a school that they do not require. What Ofsted wants is high quality education, a broad and balanced curriculum, and I know that the chief inspector is focusing on curriculum in particular from what she said in public in her speeches about these issues. Ultimately, however, these issues are for Ofsted.

Q1021 **Mr William Wragg:** Do you think that there is perhaps too much emphasis on the recruitment aspect of recruitment and retention and not enough on retention? Pulling at random from figures helpfully provided to me, only £91,000 was spent in 2016-17 aimed at improving teacher retention. Yet if you look at a figure, admittedly from a few years before, over £500 million was spent on training and supporting new teachers. Isn't that a complete imbalance?

Chair: That is out of the £35 million budget for teacher development and retention.

Nick Gibb: You have to do both. You cannot just ignore one and do the other. The Secretary of State takes this issue very seriously. We have published a retention and recruitment strategy, building on what has already been achieved in those areas. The workload issue and making sure that we focus on pupil behaviour are absolutely key to retention and we will continue to do that work.

Recruitment is also important. We are living in an era when we have a very strong economy. We have the lowest level of unemployment in this country for over 40 years, and that has an impact on graduate recruitment as well. Everyone is competing for the best graduates, whether it is the other professions, commerce and industry, or banking, and don't forget it is not exclusive to this country. There are other countries in the developed world that also face these same challenges in terms of recruiting graduates into the teaching profession. We have worked tirelessly on this issue and I have meetings every single week



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with officials—we go through the data, we produce new initiatives—to make sure that we are doing everything we can. I don't know if you have seen the adverts that we have put out incentivising people to come into teaching. I believe they are very effective. They remind people of the joys of being a teacher in our schools and the impact they can have on generations ahead.

Mr William Wragg: Okay. I think opening that up would lead me into questions of value for money, golden handshakes and so on, so we will leave that one there and I will hand over to my colleague.

Q1022 Thelma Walker: I do agree with you about the joy of teaching and learning—I did it for 34 years myself—but I also know about the number of hours, the hard work and commitment from teachers.

I have a set of figures here that *The Observer* newspaper published a couple of weeks ago. They are DfE figures. In 2016, 34,910 teachers left the profession for non-retirement reasons. That is up from 22,000 in 2011. Fifty-four hours is the average number of hours worked by classroom teachers each week—that is the average number of hours—and 75% of UK teachers are reporting symptoms of stress, including depression, anxiety and panic attacks, compared with 60% for the working population as a whole. Don't you think these figures are just so damning about the current situation? Do you think a sabbatical is going to address that?

Nick Gibb: The sabbatical is only one small element of a wider range of policies designed to increase the status of the teaching profession. CPD is also part of that process—making sure that teachers have access to continuous professional development, as they do in other professions. It is not the key policy aim of retention. There are still more people joining the profession than leaving the profession. Last year—

Q1023 Thelma Walker: They are leaving very shortly afterwards. They are not staying in the profession. I know the joy of teaching and learning and it is not there for many in the current climate in our schools.

Nick Gibb: You say the current climate. After the first five years of being in the profession, something like 70% of people are still in the profession. It has been broadly that figure for the last 20 years. There will, of course, be young people who start teaching and realise it is not for them and they decide to leave and that does happen in the first five years of a profession. It is round about 70%. It may have gone down to 69%, but it is roughly the same figure as it has been for the last five years.

Q1024 Thelma Walker: Yet 10% of teachers leave within one year of qualifying.

Nick Gibb: Yes, but it is no good just looking at one year's figures. In terms of policy development, you have to look at it over a period. Has that changed in recent years and has it changed significantly? Even notwithstanding all that, we are introducing a range of policies, and have had a range of policies, designed to increase retention because every



teacher that stays in the profession puts less pressure on the recruitment side of the profession. We are tackling that and that is what the workload work that we have been doing since 2014 has been all about, and it is what the recruitment and retention strategy that we will announce later this year is all about. We do take retention extremely seriously.

Q1025 Thelma Walker: Can I ask you to comment on that figure of 75% of teachers suffering stress? How does that make you feel, as Schools Minister?

Nick Gibb: We don't want the profession to feel stressed, absolutely not, and that is why Nicky Morgan, when she was Secretary of State, launched the workload challenge because she was aware of these issues, as I was. We asked the profession, "Why is it that there is this level of excess workload in the profession?" There were 44,000 responses and the top three responses were those I discussed earlier: data collection, dialogic marking—

Q1026 Thelma Walker: High stakes accountability?

Nick Gibb: That is an issue but it is lower than those three. Those three were absolutely the top, by a margin. Accountability has always been in our system. It has certainly been there since 1990 in terms of the reforms from the 1988 Act. If you look around the world, the most effective education systems, according to the OECD, combine autonomy with strong accountability, and that is the thrust of our policy. We want schools to be autonomous—that is what the academies are all about—but you need to have the accountability as well.

Chair: Because of time, can we please be concise?

Q1027 James Frith: One quick question, Minister. Attracting and retaining teacher talent is a challenge for all schools, particularly for the schools that are hardest to teach in and for the hardest-to-reach kids in the most disadvantaged areas. Do you believe we need incentives to recruit teachers for those areas? If you do, what steps are you taking to incentivise teacher talent to go straight to our schools in disadvantaged areas?

Nick Gibb: It is a very good point. We are taking measures to do that. For example, in maths—and addressing Thelma's point about retention in those first five years as well—the tax-free bursary is £20,000, plus two lots of £5,000, one after three years in the profession and the other after five years. We have also done a pilot where it is not just going to be £5,000, it is going to be £7,500 after three years and another £7,500 after five years, in particular local authority areas that we have identified as being the most disadvantaged, as incentives, first, to undertake teacher training in those areas and, secondly, to teach in those areas for the first five years. That is it.

Q1028 Ian Mearns: There is a lot of evidence, Minister, that the crisis period now for teachers is at between five and seven years' experience. We are



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getting increasing numbers of teachers who are leaving in that crucial time. I am afraid to say, Minister, that you have appeared before this Committee in the past and have not denied it, but have talked about the Department and teaching profession meeting its targets in terms of overall recruitment, where we have tried to point out to you that in particular subject specialisms that is not actually the case. Your retort to that was always that teacher recruitment was doing quite well in global figures. The Secretary of State, quite helpfully from my perspective, has said that the biggest challenge of all is reversing the staffing crisis in the teaching profession. The Secretary of State accepts that there is a staffing crisis, there is a recruitment problem, which is increasing now in particular subject specialisms, and is now occurring in the primary sector as well in terms of recruitment, but retention, as colleagues have pointed out, is increasingly a problem with the pillars of morale, workload and pay being important to that particular edifice, holding that recruitment issue together. What are we going to do, tangibly, to reverse this particular problem? It seems to me that there are a lot of initiatives going on but it is difficult to measure what the results of those initiatives are going to be unless we can tackle morale, workload and pay.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and we are addressing those issues. One of the other things the Secretary of State said—I think it was at the ASCEL conference—was about a period of stability. There is no question that the reforms that we have introduced since 2010, and they particularly came into effect between the 2014-15 and 2017 period—new GCSEs, new A levels, the new SATs, the new primary curriculum—have put pressure on the profession. What we want now is a period of stability to enable those very important reforms to bed in. The Secretary of State has given a commitment that there will be no new changes to the curriculum, other than those already announced, such as in relationships education and so on, and no new tests or qualifications other than those already announced, such as the multiplication tables check for year-4 children. I think that is important, to allow a period of stability and to enable teachers just to get to grips with the reforms that have been introduced. We are also taking very seriously all those workload issues that I have been discussing earlier.

Teacher pay is an important issue. In terms of retention, the evidence is that teachers who do leave before retirement do not generally go on to higher-paid jobs. However, I remain personally of the view that pay must be a factor, to some extent, in recruitment, in encouraging young graduates to come into the teaching profession. We rely on the evidence that the School Teachers' Review Body looks at. They are advised by experts. We will look at their report, which has been sent to the Secretary of State, and later, before the recess, we will respond to that report and their recommendations.

Q1029 **Ian Mearns:** You would accept, though, that there is a rash of initiatives aimed at recruitment. Do you not think it is time to draw a line and get rid of a lot of that "initiativitis" and look at what really works?



Nick Gibb: I don't accept that because some of those initiatives—the tax-free bursaries, for example—are very important and they have been, I think, successful; you can see it when we move those bursary levels around how the registration, the application numbers, change. The other things we are doing in terms of the skills test, getting rid of the fees for registering with UCAS and so on, all those initiatives have been very important and so are the different routes into teaching. Whether it is through SCITT, through School Direct or through university, it is important to have different routes that adapt to people's different circumstances.

Q1030 **Emma Hardy:** On Saturday I had the pleasure of listening to Laura McInerney give a presentation on recruitment and retention, and some of the statistics that she shared were quite shocking. For one of them, she asked teachers this question: "In an ideal world, and taking into account any loss in salary, how many days a week would you work?" Now, 47% of teachers asked said that even with a loss of salary, they would work a four-day week given the choice. She calculated that if 40% of teachers dropped one day per week, we would need an extra 40,000 teachers. Of those 40,000 teachers, obviously if some of those teachers did not want to work full-time, that number is only going to increase. She also pointed out that 30% of teachers trained go and work in the private sector. Minister, do you think that more could be done to regain costs to the taxpayer of paying people to train who go and work in the private sector, when we have such a recruitment and retention problem for our state schools?

Nick Gibb: I do think that the teaching profession needs to enable more flexibility for working part-time. We had a flexible working summit a few months ago in order to do this. I have a note here, "While the percentage of teachers working part-time has stayed steady, about 23%, only 28% of women teachers work part-time compared to approximately 41% of the overall UK female workforce".

Q1031 **Emma Hardy:** With respect, Minister, I was talking about us paying to train teachers when we desperately need them and we have this huge shortage, and 30% of teachers that we pay to train are going to work in the private sector. Therefore, do you not feel like something more could be done to regain the cost?

Nick Gibb: Those figures cannot be right. The private sector only teaches 7% of the population and they have their own training schemes as well.

Q1032 **Emma Hardy:** We also have, of course, 20,000 teachers who are going abroad to work in international schools who we have paid to train as well.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and they come back and bring that experience with them.

Emma Hardy: Some.



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Nick Gibb: There were 14,000 returners into the teaching profession in the latest figures we have for 2016 compared to 11,000 a few years before, so the returners are increasing.

Q1033 **Emma Hardy:** Again, more could be done to recoup the costs to us of training people to go and work in the private sector or go and work abroad.

Nick Gibb: Yes, but they come back and this is good experience, and the more restrictions you put on people the less of an incentive it gives for people to come into the profession.

I just want to go back to this flexible working thing because it is very important. I accept what Laura McInerney was saying but, of course, if schools were a little bit more flexible in terms of allowing flexible working, it makes the profession more attractive and, therefore, will attract more people into it.

Q1034 **Emma Hardy:** We would need another 40,000 teachers if they were able to do so.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and it will be easier to attract those 40,000 if schools were a little bit more flexible in allowing the same kind of freedoms—

Emma Hardy: With respect, Minister, we are only training 19,000.

Nick Gibb: —the same kind of flexibilities that other professions and other workplaces have in England, and that is what we are trying to do with flexible working. I think it is an important reform.

Q1035 **Chair:** Just very quickly, if you can give a quick answer please, why has there been a 13.2% increase in the number of teachers in primary schools between November 2010 and November 2016?

Nick Gibb: Sorry, I didn't catch that bit.

Chair: A 13.2% increase in the number of primary and nursery school teachers between November 2010 and November 2016 and a 4.9% decrease for secondary school teachers in the same period.

Nick Gibb: There was an increasing birth rate I think around the turn of the millennium and then that fed first of all into primary schools. That increased birth rate I think has been continuing since then. Then, of course, it takes a number of years for that to feed into secondary schools and, in fact, during the early part of that period the population in secondary schools was declining so that is the reason for that. Now, of course, this bulge is coming through into the secondary schools.

Q1036 **Chair:** You expect the number of secondary school teachers to increase?

Nick Gibb: Yes.

Q1037 **Trudy Harrison:** On 4 May, the Secretary of State announced plans for a clearer system of accountability at the National Association of Head



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Teachers conference. You are responsible for accountability. Why do you feel that the system needs such disentanglement?

Nick Gibb: What he was talking about was that as we have moved from 200 academies in 2010 to over 7,000 academies, we introduced regional schools commissioners, who are civil servants based around the country in order to provide oversight of the academies' programme, which was too big to be administered totally from Whitehall. That was the regional schools commissioners.

The problem was that we were getting feedback from head teachers who were telling us that they felt under scrutiny from too many angles. They had Ofsted looking at them. They had the regional schools commissioners' office or their people coming in to, they felt, inspect them. They had the local authority wanting to talk to them, and then they had all the other accountability measures, the performance measures and so on. Repeatedly, when I was visiting schools and when the Secretary of State was visiting schools we heard this message that there is too much pressure, and I think it is part of the issue that we talked about over here with the pressure on the profession.

This Secretary of State is absolutely determined to tackle workload issues, to raise the status of the profession and to tackle the issues that are of concern to teachers. He is listening to their concerns. I am listening to the profession's concerns and this is one of their concerns. We wanted to clarify and we have worked very hard leading up to that speech to be much clearer. I remember meeting a head teacher who had just taken over a school that was in special measures and he said to me, "I have all these people coming in. I have Ofsted, I have regional schools commissioners, I have the local authority, all busy talking to me about what I am doing to turn this school around. I wish they would just let me get on with it". That is what we are trying to do.

There is Ofsted and we have been very clear that if you go into special measures, then the academy order is triggered by statute and that starts. The other measures that we had, warning notices and all the issues and the guidance called "schools concerning concern", we just wanted to be clear when there would be intervention and when there would not. We have been clear: the academisation process starts for a maintained school if the school is put into special measures. Other than that, we are consulting on and discussing a metric that will determine when a school is offered support. If there is a problem, for example, with the maths in a school, then a metric will trigger that and the school will be offered support, say, from a national leader of education who specialises in maths or from one of the maths hubs that can help that school improve. The purpose of the speech was to say that we are going to have clarity about those kinds of accountability measures.

Chair: What you are saying is incredibly interesting, but can I ask you just to be more concise because we still have a fair bit to go through?



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Nick Gibb: Yes, sorry.

Q1038 **Trudy Harrison:** What you are actually talking about is less accountability, and what we have found on this Committee is more accountability is needed on the multi-academy trusts, not necessarily the schools.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and we agree with that, but that intervention should be at the trust level rather than at the school level. We totally agree with that.

Q1039 **Trudy Harrison:** Would you also agree that the lack of accountability on multi-academy trusts has resulted in the decline of standards particularly in the north of England?

Nick Gibb: No. I think the whole multi-academy trust development and the academisation programme is delivering higher standards, including in the north. The issue in the north is that we do not have enough good sponsors, good multi-academy trusts, that drive higher standards. We need more Harrises, more Arks, more Outwood Granges. Outwood Grange is a northern-based academy chain, but we need more of those, and that is what the development fund is all about.

Q1040 **Trudy Harrison:** How are we going to weed out the bad ones if Ofsted cannot inspect the multi-academy trusts?

Nick Gibb: These are issues that we keep under review. They can certainly batch inspect a large number of academies in a particular chain, rather than just waiting for that particular school's turn to come in terms of the timing, to do them at the same time, and then you get a feel for the quality of education in those particular academies in that multi-academy trust. We continue to keep under review the other issues about whether Ofsted should be looking at the back office and the services provided by the multi-academy trust to those schools.

Q1041 **Ian Mearns:** Did I hear somewhere, Minister, that a school had recently been de-academised; it had gone back to maintained status? Is that happening or in the process of happening?

Nick Gibb: I am not aware of that happening at all. What tends to happen when a school is in a multi-academy trust—and, again, it is about the accountability being at the trust level—is when the trust is clearly not delivering the support to enable those underperforming schools to improve, then there will be a rebrokering that will occur.

Q1042 **Ian Mearns:** There are an awful lot of orphan schools, aren't there, still? I thought I had heard somewhere that one of them was in the process of being de-academised.

Nick Gibb: I am not aware of that. If I am wrong, I will write to the Chair of the Committee.

Q1043 **Ian Mearns:** Thank you. Do you think that the schools are working for



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everyone, Minister? We are seeing a significant number of youngsters being excluded on a daily basis. I think in the last session that we had we talked about off-rolling and I think you were going to clarify some of the questions of off-rolling. Are schools working for all youngsters now?

Nick Gibb: I think they are. Most teachers and head teachers I meet are professional people and they want to do the best for all the pupils in their schools, particularly those children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. We discussed exclusions. Although there has been a small rise in exclusions I think since 2015, they are still significantly lower than they were in 2010 in terms of the number of exclusions. Of course, we are having this review into exclusions, and we are also having a call for evidence in terms of home education, which will cover the issue off-rolling that you referred to.

Q1044 **Ian Mearns:** Sixty-seven per cent of school leaders report that workload is a barrier to teacher retention. We have already talked about that. More than 50% of children in the north, as Thelma was pointing out, in deprived areas are attending schools rated less than good. Do you think that schools really are working for everyone, Minister? I just do not know how you can come to the conclusion that they are when clearly the stats show that they are not.

Nick Gibb: There are still issues that we need to deal with. We want every school to be delivering the same quality of education that we see in the best schools, and that is everything we are trying to do. That is what the opportunity areas are about. It is about the Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy. All these other policies are about designing policy to ensure that the improvements we have seen in certain parts of the country are spread right across the country.

There are still issues that we need to deal with. We need to be looking at how foreign languages are taught. We need to increase the proportion of young people taking the EBacc qualification. It still worries me that despite the increase, as I described earlier, in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils taking the EBacc combination, it is still lower than non-disadvantaged pupils. That gap needs to be narrowed significantly, in my view.

I am worried about the curriculum at key stage 3. I worry about the key stage 3 becoming two years in some schools, which means that some children are missing out on a third year of history or geography or a third year of science. Even if they continue to do science at GCSE they are missing a year's knowledge in that subject. That worries me hugely. I know it worries the chief inspector of schools as well. There are still issues to deal with. We are determined that all those cold spots around the country where there are too many schools that are underperforming is now the focus of our policy.

Q1045 **Ian Mearns:** Youngsters are also missing out on creative subjects and arts at the moment. It seems to me—not just me, but people in the



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field—that the narrowing of the curriculum seems to be happening in some schools so that schools can concentrate on the EBacc subjects, but youngsters are missing out, therefore, on a more rounded curriculum in terms of their overall life experience.

Nick Gibb: I would say there is nothing narrow about studying maths, English, a humanity—history or geography—at least two sciences, and a foreign language. I think it is a narrowing curriculum when students do not study a foreign language or are not studying at least two sciences. One of the great achievements of this Government is that back in 2011 something like 63% of pupils were taking at least two sciences. Today that is 91%. I think that is a great achievement. In that 91% will be significant numbers of disadvantaged pupils now taking double science to GCSE.

In terms of the arts, there is this notion somehow that the EBacc is driving out the arts. This simply is not true. We have always determined to keep the EBacc small, and do not forget the arts are compulsory from age 5 through to age 14—both music and art are compulsory. If you look at the GCSE in music, 7% of the cohort then go on to take a music GCSE. That was in 2010, and the figure today is 7%. If you look at art and design, back in 2010 26% of the cohort were taking a GCSE in art and design. Today that figure is 27%. There has been no change in the proportions and the same in terms of the proportion taking at last one art at GCSE. It has stayed around about 46% to 47% over that period. I would contend that the EBacc itself is a broad and balanced curriculum and it still leaves room for these other subjects for those people that want to take them.

Q1046 **Ian Mearns:** Briefly coming back to Trudy's point about academy trusts, will you relent and allow Ofsted to inspect academy trusts?

Nick Gibb: As I said earlier, these are issues we keep under review and we continue to discuss them.

Q1047 **Ian Mearns:** That is where the accountability lies, though, you are suggesting? That is where the accountability should lie for the management of academies at the trust level.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and the way that is being done at the moment is that, as I said, they do it through batched inspections of the schools that lie underneath that multi-academy trust, but we do keep these issues under review. We continually discuss this particular point.

Q1048 **James Frith:** I point Members to my register of interests. We talked about EBacc, so I am not going to rehearse that. For me, in the link between primary school and secondary school and then secondary on to post-16, my concern would be for a young person who has played by the rules, essentially, and pursued an EBacc, has performed well academically, how will they ever find out whether a technical or vocational qualification and route is right for them if they have simply pursued a system that is not giving them up for that as a taster, as an



appetite, as an inspirational choice for them? We have a situation where the current year 7s, as I envisage, will be the first tranche of students to begin the T level. What is happening in the earlier years to embed in them a sense of what is possible for them to choose either the traditional academic route or the T level, which is a still a very cloudy, foggy picture for a lot of us? Just develop some thoughts on that for me, please, Minister.

Nick Gibb: These more practical subjects, design and technology, of course, are still in the curriculum at an early age. Schools are required, through the careers issue, to ensure that their pupils are informed about other options, including the apprenticeship, which is in primary legislation, and we have improved the quality of apprenticeships.

The Wolf review looked at a lot of the vocational qualifications—in fact, she looked at all of them—that were being studied by pupils under the age of 16. She found that 96% of them had no value in the marketplace, but the ones that remain are of value and so are important. Again, that is why the EBacc is sufficiently small to enable a pupil who wants to take a vocational qualification pre-16 to do so in that slot. Alison Wolf is very clear that even for children who are determined to take a technical route, up until the age of 16 they should not be spending more than 20% of their GCSE time on non-academic subjects, because academic subjects pre-16 are the best preparation for a technical education, particularly the sciences, maths, English, and so on.

In terms of the T levels, we are determined that those qualifications will be of very high quality. We have announced three already. I think it is digital, construction, and education and childcare. We are working on the subject content to make sure that it is rigorous and of a high standard. We want these technical qualifications to be employer led and of a high quality.

Q1049 **James Frith:** How do you work to dispel any notion of a failed path for T level while maintaining the successes having done EBacc and into academic? I have some sympathy with the argument that the academic rigour pre-16 is right, but I think it is more than simply what is taught. It is what feels valued. At the time of choosing, how do we ensure that students feel empowered to choose a technical qualification as a good route for them rather than it being seen as a “B level” option?

Nick Gibb: Yes. I agree with you and that is the challenge. It is the determination of this Government to create the parity of esteem between the technical route and the academic route. That is why we set up the Sainsbury review. He talked about these 15 routes and then at the end of those routes there will be one qualification per profession or trade so that there was not competition between exam boards, which can have a tendency—this is something I am worried about in terms of GCSEs and A levels—to systematise a downward pressure over time in terms of standards. We are determined that these T levels will have very high expectations. If it means an extra year in preparing to take a T level, so



be it. We just want those T levels to be of a very high quality. That is how you engineer parity of esteem between the technical route and the academic route. I know it is something very dear to the Chair's heart as well.

Q1050 James Frith: Employers would not disagree that maths and an ability to communicate using verbal or written skills is important—English, maths, and EBacc subjects that you talk about. What we know they say is that there is a lack of contextual appreciation or contextual learning that helps a young person apply those skills, which is very much in the technical and vocational family of learning, that ability to perform and apply what you have learned as opposed to simply demonstrate that you know it.

Would you look at revisiting—I am not talking about a narrowing of the total curriculum but within the subject areas—expanding those subjects to include far better applied what in old money was work-related learning, which employers to this day say is an important value for them when it comes to recruiting or taking apprentices on? Would you revisit that? Do you think we are too constricted in what we evaluate as English and maths for application in the workplace?

Nick Gibb: I accept what you say post-16, and there will be some youngsters below the age of 16 who do struggle with the GCSE in English and the GCSE in maths. There are functional skills qualifications that we have again reformed so that they are of a higher standard than before. We want those functional skills qualifications to have value with employers. Those might be the right qualifications for those particular youngsters. I should say something like 71% of children up to the age of 19 have a level 2 qualification in English and maths. This is the highest ever level, and I think those two qualifications at level 2 are absolutely the key to social mobility. I am delighted that we have reached the 71% figure, but it needs to be higher.

Q1051 James Frith: Finally, do you hope that students who perform academically extremely well go on and do T levels?

Nick Gibb: I do not hope anything—

Q1052 James Frith: Do you hope there will be example of a high-performing academic student pursuing T levels?

Nick Gibb: Yes. The routes have to be right for the individual person and if an academic—

Q1053 James Frith: Will a T level be right for a highly academic student?

Nick Gibb: It might be if that is their interest. If they are highly academic but want to pursue a technical route and want to use their high academic achievement because they want to get on and become very proficient in a particular technical route, yes. Some of the best apprenticeships that industry offer are very competitive and some people with very strong academic qualifications are taking those apprenticeships because they see that as the best route to a successful career in industry.



Q1054 Michelle Donelan: I do not want to get into a debate of what should be in the EBacc and what should not, but I want to focus on design and technology, which you yourself have recognised the value of and that is why the curriculum and the course has been updated and transformed into a much more academic and highly respected course. However, the figures show that it has dramatically plummeting in terms of the uptake and we are losing a lot of teachers in that field. Given that the industry recognises it as a very valuable subject for a pipeline career in engineering or in technical related roles and that that is what our economy needs, do you not think that it is time to revisit whether that should be included in the EBacc?

Nick Gibb: There are very specific issues relating to design and technology. The numbers taking the GCSE were falling before we came into office and they were falling before we introduced the EBacc in 2012. They were falling because of concerns over the quality of the curriculum. As part of the GCSE reforms, we did reform the design and technology GCSE. We worked with the Dyson Foundation in doing that, so it is much more about design and the iterative process of design. Now we have a much higher quality GCSE going forward, which I think will be more attractive to people.

Q1055 Michelle Donelan: That was done, but the uptake of design and technology still went down by over 10% in 2017. Then we are losing the teachers in it, and if the teacher is not there to teach it, it does not matter how many students want to take it, does it? There has been a big call from the sector and from Dyson himself backing the campaign, which I also tried to instigate, to get design and technology added to EBacc to give it that kind of clout. If we are wanting people to study T levels, we need them to recognise at GCSE level that some of these technical qualifications can be just as academic.

Chair: Just to add to what Michelle was saying, the Design Council suggests that our shortages in design and technology skills is costing the economy about £5.9 billion a year.

Nick Gibb: I think these are early days in terms of people's understanding of what is in the design. This is a very different GCSE and we have very generous bursaries in terms of recruiting graduates into the design and technology teacher training route because of recognising that very point. We will have to see.

In terms of changing the EBacc, I am always resistant to changes to the composition of the EBacc because it is designed to deal with those core subjects and as soon as you start changing it or adding subjects to it, you either increase its size or you damage the uptake of those other core subjects. My view is that there are different levers for different things and you should not always be using the same lever.

Q1056 Chair: If you were talking to Lord Baker, he would say it should be a core subject. As you know, he has suggested that design and technology



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should be a core part of the EBacc along with a creative GCSE, a humanities GCSE, and then the existing sciences, maths and English.

Nick Gibb: Yes, and there are other people who have other views. Other people would like religious studies to be in the EBacc.

Q1057 **Chair:** But given the skills deficit and the changing nature of the economy and the march of the robot—obviously there are core subjects like maths and English, but given the changing nature of the economy, artificial intelligence and so on, surely you should look at what you might need to change and what the core subjects should be as part of the EBacc.

Nick Gibb: The EBacc does include computer science and we did change it to reflect that very point about the digital world that we are moving into. The point I am making is you cannot use that same lever for EBacc to solve all issues. You need other levers to deal with that. I think the EBacc is best left well alone. People understand it. It is about maths. It is about English. It is about double or triple science. It is a humanity—either history or geography—and it is about a foreign language. It is about tackling those particular issues that the EBacc was designed for. We do need to have more young people taking foreign languages. We are also going to be rolling out modern foreign language hubs to make sure that we are teaching children a foreign language in the most effective way based on the work of Ian Bauckham and his review. I would say that we need to use other levers in order to improve the uptake of other subjects such as design and technology.

Q1058 **Michelle Donelan:** I appreciate your point about not wanting to ruin the system. However, our education system is also about feeding our economy. It needs to be responsive and it needs to change and we should never have anything that is too fixed because otherwise we are going to end up in a bit of a mess. We do need to tackle the skills gap in STEM and particularly in engineering. That is what the whole year of engineering is about. We have done that with the computer science element, but it is more important to have that design and technology. You spoke before about learning from Asia. Japan and other countries have said that they have an innovation crisis and they have been introducing design and technology as a core part of their curriculum at a younger age than what we have done. Don't you think it is time that we address this issue? If we are serious about STEM and we are serious about that pipeline, then potentially we could give way on this one area.

Chair: Austria are doing this, Canada are doing this, and certain parts of Canada have very good standards and results and low levels of NEETs.

Nick Gibb: All these different jurisdictions are in different places and we have a problem with our foreign languages. We need to make sure that young people are taking at least two sciences. Nearly 40% of the cohort were not taking two sciences; they were taking one. The EBacc has delivered that change from 63% up to 91% taking at least two sciences, some of which will be computer science, and I think that is very



important. As soon as you start tinkering with the composition of the EBacc, you jeopardise those improvements, and we still have a lot more to do in terms of foreign languages. They have gone from, I think, 40% to 47%, but that is a significantly lower proportion than all of our European partners. We need more young people taking foreign languages.

The EBacc is carefully constructed. It is small to enable people to take music and art and design and to take design technology in addition to those core subjects.

Q1059 **Michelle Donelan:** But they are not taking them.

Nick Gibb: They are doing it in music and they are doing it in art and design. The issue is about design and technology, which is a separate issue because historically, for many years, it has been in decline. We are trying to reverse that, but you do not always have to use the same tool to tackle all the problems. I think there are other ways. The first thing we did was to improve the quality of the GCSE with the Dyson Foundation. We will see what happens as knowledge of that GCSE spreads through the system and we are recruiting at the graduate level the right teachers coming into the profession.

Q1060 **Michelle Donelan:** The Design and Technology Association is concerned that it will be too late, because the rate that we are haemorrhaging design and technology teachers means that by the time you have that credibility around the subject the teaching staff will not be there anymore—it will be just too late. It needs bold action now and a signpost from the Government that this is academic and this is on a par with computer science.

Nick Gibb: We can certainly send the message that we believe this is important, but the Secretary of State has been very clear about stability in the system. I am very clear that for the EBacc as constructed there just needs to be a stability in the system, but we can take other measures in terms of trying to improve the uptake of design and technology and trying to ensure we have sufficient numbers of highly qualified teachers to teach what is a more demanding design and technology curriculum.

Q1061 **Chair:** Going back to what Lord Baker says, why not make a design and technology GCSE or an approved technical award part of the core EBacc?

Nick Gibb: Most of the subjects in the EBacc are either compulsory to age 16 or they were compulsory to 16 until 2004. They are designed to do two specific things: to reverse the decline in history and geography and, more significantly and more importantly because of the very significant drop in foreign languages, to reverse the study of foreign languages.

Q1062 **Chair:** I am not arguing with you. It is not that the other core subjects are not important, but there has also been a huge decline in design and



technology, as my colleague Michelle has pointed out. Clearly, given the changes in the economy and the skills deficit we have, either design and technology or serious vocational qualifications could be added as part of it.

Nick Gibb: Yes, but then you run the risk of reversing the improvements we have made in those other things. For example, if you put it into the science core, then there is a risk that those taking physics will decline, and we are desperately short of physics A level. Although that has increased significantly since 2010, we still do not have enough people taking physics, particularly among girls, and we need more physics graduates. We are very proud of the achievements in physics and chemistry and biology and computer sciences that have increased since 2010. If you start putting more options within the science thing, you endanger those achievements. Secondly, if you create a sixth pillar, you then make it too large and you restrict the ability of pupils to take, say, a second foreign language or art or music or economics or to take a vocational subject in that slot of two GCSEs.

Q1063 **Chair:** What I am not clear about is that geography is necessarily more or less important than design and technology, for example, so why you would put one over the other.

Michelle Donelan: In addition to that, you do not need to create a sixth pillar and you do not need to worry about the whole science issue, because you can say that the child can either do computer science or design and technology as an EBacc subject and that solves the entire problem, adds the flexibility to the system and is not that big a deal, but you give the credibility back to the subject.

Nick Gibb: Computer science is something we are focused on and we do want to see those numbers rise. They have risen from something like 3% of the cohort to 12% taking it.

Q1064 **Chair:** Why are geography and history more important in terms of core subject than something like design and technology or a serious vocational qualification?

Nick Gibb: I am not saying it is more important. What I am saying is that to be broadly educated up to the age of 16, it is important that students know their place in the world. There has been a decline in both geography and history, and to have young people broadly educated in those core academic subjects, the ones that the Russell Group say at A level provide the widest opportunity for entry into high-tariff universities, they need to have that broad and balanced curriculum up to the age of 16. It does not exclude other subjects, like design and technology, in terms of time in the curriculum.

Q1065 **Michelle Donelan:** I can understand why what the Chair is suggesting might be viewed then as dismantling the EBacc and become a bit more onerous. However, I still go back to the point of why is computer science more fruitful for the economy than design and technology, because all



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the evidence that we have and all the industry experts, including Dyson who wrote the course with you, say that design and technology is much more important than computer science. If you were giving the students the option, what is the logic behind that?

Nick Gibb: Computer science—we are living in a digital age—is a challenging GCSE, and we wanted to make sure not only that the numbers were increasing, which they are doing because of the EBacc, we also want more girls to be taking computer science. All I am saying is we want stability in the system, and you do not necessarily have to use the same lever to tackle other challenges in other curriculum areas. Our focus now is finding other levers to use to improve the uptake of design and technology.

Q1066 **Chair:** Sir Michael Wilshaw, who shares your passion for high standards—and Ken Baker, who I am sure you would agree also shares a passion for high standards; I am not quoting people who oppose what you are trying to do—said in 2015 that he thinks that the EBacc would be a problem for some students and could “think of youngsters who would have been better suited to do English, maths and science and a range of vocational subjects.”

Nick Gibb: I am afraid we just disagree. The particular composition of the EBacc is commonplace in a lot of countries around the world where youngsters are expected to take that combination right through to 16 and in some countries to 18. We are an outlier in terms of not having young people taking that combination to GCSE, particularly the issue of the foreign language. The dialogue that we have had today with Michelle, I could be having the same dialogue over here or over here with another particular subject and the same arguments would be put.

Michelle Donelan: But not with the economic value to the country.

Nick Gibb: You say that but others would say that their particular subject has very strong economic value as well. We are living in a very creative age and Britain excels in the creative industries. You could argue other subjects should be put into the EBacc, and I resist those and make the argument that we need other levers to ensure that the same proportion or higher are taking a music GCSE, the same proportion or higher are taking art GCSEs—

Q1067 **James Frith:** Just on that point, I think there is a lot more agreement here than you are recognising, Minister. I think Michelle’s point, excellently made, is simply within one area of what is a bedded-in programme for students to be allowed to pivot, to choose and to have a choice within one field that may, to my earlier line of questioning, play into the choices that they will have to make at some point about a vocational bent or a route to their learning. To your point about the industry, you are absolutely right. Let us congratulate an assessment that says one party will tell you their economy is more important than somebody else’s, but that is where an education system needs to adapt



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to those areas of interest and the industry's interest. Computer science is absolutely front and centre of digital consideration, but then some of the concerns of other industries are being let down because those students that will have natural areas of interest are not being allowed to pursue it. It is surely worth reviewing giving a range of options within one area of that EBacc make-up for the sake of a blended economy.

Chair: Surely EBacc should not be an inflexible thing. The needs of the economy change. The Government make decisions about our skills needs, and they identify where we have skills deficits that are damaging the economy. Surely the EBacc should reflect those changing needs.

Nick Gibb: There is nothing to stop a young person taking design and technology in addition to the EBacc. Some would argue that physics, chemistry and maths are important contributors to design and technology going forward after the age of 16. I think up to the age of 16 children need to have a broad and balanced high-quality education, the kind of education that people from more advantaged backgrounds pay for or move schools to get. That combination is what high-performing jurisdictions around the world ensure that all their 16-year-olds have.

If you are moving into a very dynamic world economy and a very dynamic modern British economy where things change all the time, what you need are young people who are cognitively developed, who read, who have good general knowledge, who understand the fundamentals of science, who are good at mathematics and, I would contend, are cognisant or even fluent in a foreign language, then after the age of 16—and maybe before the age of 16 in terms of that extra option, studying design and technology and so on—beginning to focus on their long-term career. That is the age at which you develop those technical skills that industry is demanding—having under your belt a good quality, broad and balanced curriculum and a broad and balanced education.

Q1068 **Michelle Donelan:** I completely agree with you and I agree completely with the EBacc, but you have already slightly altered that by having computer science in there so you have crossed your own Rubicon. You could do design and technology because you have already said we are going to introduce something that is not a core academic subject at the very beginning.

Nick Gibb: Except that there is something different about the digital world that we are moving into where everybody—regardless of whether you go into an artistic creative sector or whether you go into something more technical or commercial—needs a good understanding of computer science. What we are trying to do there with computer science is just to make sure that we did not just change the computer science GCSE, the whole of the ICT curriculum changed to become computer science from day one.

Chair: Okay. I am sure we will battle on this again.

Nick Gibb: I am sure we will.



Q1069 Chair: A very last question, you will be pleased to know, and I understand you have been here a long time. Just going quickly back to the attainment gap, the Education Endowment Foundation found that it is not only the schools assessed by Ofsted as performing poorly but the gap is as large in terms of the attainment gap in schools rating outstanding as it is in schools rating inadequate. Do you recognise this and, if so, why and what are you going to do about that?

Nick Gibb: I worry about the absolute level of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. We want to close the gap but, of course, we do not want to close the gap at the expense of children that are doing very well. We want to improve those children at the bottom. We have seen, as I have said, the attainment gap index closing by 10% to key stage 4 since 2010, but we need to do more. There is no question we need to do more and that is what our reforms are all about.

Q1070 Chair: Why would the attainment gap be as bad in the outstanding schools as the schools rated inadequate?

Nick Gibb: I will need to look at that specific point. I do not have the correct technical answer to give you about that, but all I would say is that all schools need to address the performance of children at the bottom. For example, I am sorry to go on about reading, but one of the changes we made to the previous framework for Ofsted was to ensure that inspectors heard the weakest children read in primary school, not just the average but the weakest, because I think you judge a school's reading by how well the weakest readers read, not necessarily by how well the average or the best readers read in a school.

I think it is important to focus on the curriculum for those least able and that is why I am so passionate about things like the EBacc and why our target is for 75% of youngsters to start studying that in year 10 by 2022 and 90% by 2025 because those are the combination of subjects. You have seen the difference that I cited earlier between the proportion from advantaged homes being entered for the EBacc, 43% today, compared to 25% from disadvantaged backgrounds. Why is there a gap between those two sections of society? There should not be a gap just because your household income is lower. Why should you be subject to a different curriculum? I can understand it if there are particular educational issues. That is why we say 90%, not 100%, because there will be 10% of the cohort who have real difficulty in taking the EBacc, but it should not be dependent on the income of your parents whether you take the EBacc or not. Absolutely, there is still more to do in terms of addressing some of the unfairness in our education system.

Q1071 Chair: Thank you. I think the Committee certainly would—

Emma Hardy: Sorry, I wanted to make a clarification.

Nick Gibb: I thought I had got away with it.

Chair: We thought you could go but I beg your pardon, one more thing.



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Emma Hardy: No, I have to make a correction. Earlier on I said 30% to private schools instead of 30,000 to private schools, so I just wanted to make that correction.

Chair: I think we would agree with you in terms of your last statement and that is what we are trying to do: address social injustice in the education system. Can I thank you for giving, whether we agree or disagree, incredibly comprehensive and thoughtful answers and for being here much longer than was intended? It is appreciated.

Nick Gibb: Thank you very much.