

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Life Chances](#), HC 1006

Tuesday 12 June 2018

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; Emma Hardy; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell; Thelma Walker; Mr William Wragg.

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Witnesses

I: Liz Bayram, Chief Executive, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, Sara Bonetti, Associate Director of Early Years, Education Policy Institute, Beatrice Merrick, Chief Executive, Early Education, and Professor Dominic Wyse, Professor of Early Childhood and Primary Education, UCL Institute of Education.

II: Sir Kevan Collins, Chief Executive, Education Endowment Foundation, Laura McFarlane, Director of the LEAP Programme, National Children's Bureau, Steven McIntosh, Director of UK Poverty Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns, Save the Children, and Professor Edward Melhuish, Professor of Human Development, University of Oxford.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Liz Bayram, Sara Bonetti, Beatrice Merrick and Professor Dominic Wyse.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you for coming today. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on the internet, could you kindly introduce yourselves and your positions, from our left to right? The acoustics are not great, so could you speak loudly throughout the proceedings? Thank you.

Liz Bayram: My name is Liz Bayram. I am Chief Executive of PACEY, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years.

Beatrice Merrick: I am Beatrice Merrick. I am Chief Executive of Early Education, the British association for early childhood education.

Sara Bonetti: Good morning. I am Sara Bonetti. I am Associate Director of Early Years at the Education Policy Institute.

Professor Wyse: Good morning, Professor Dominic Wyse from UCL Institute of Education and the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy.

Q2 **Lucy Powell:** Good morning. Don't worry, we are not going to be horrible. We are horrible to some people, but only when it is deserved, just for the tape. We are launching this inquiry on life chances and we know some of the statistics are very stark. The single biggest indicator of how well a child will do in their GCSEs is how school ready they are at the age of five. A child from a more affluent background will have heard over 30 million more words by the age of three than somebody from a less advantaged background, and so on, stuff that you are all very familiar with. What role can and does early education play in rebalancing some of those inequalities that we see before children even arrive at school, as a general opener? Who wants to come in on that one first?

Professor Wyse: I am happy to launch in. You are quite right. We know that effective education—effective teaching and effective parenting—are absolutely vital in terms of how young children are going to develop through their lives. When it is at its best, it really does have a strong impact on helping children from more disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve more. I would caution about too simplistic ideas of disadvantage and language and the links. It is quite a complicated picture, but in general, yes, we know that early intervention is fantastically important.

One of the key things I want to establish today, though, is that I want us to remember that children also progress quite soon into primary education. I have a real issue with early years being too separated out from children who develop obviously in relation to their age and various factors. I do want to make that point that I think early years is—

Q3 **Lucy Powell:** Just expand on that. What do you mean?



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Professor Wyse: What I mean is, if you take curriculum planning, in England for now, then we have this very separate and distinct work that goes on around the early years and the early years foundation stage and so on, and we have this separate and distinct work that has gone on around the national curriculum. I think they should have been considered together, birth to 18, rather like Scotland did in its curriculum for excellence. I think that is the way we should be moving in future. That is not to say there is not some fantastically important stuff that is happening and work that is being done around both phases, but if you disconnect them I think there is a problem.

Q4 **Lucy Powell:** Would you extend up into primary the early years model or would you bring the primary model more into the early years?

Professor Wyse: I would plan from birth to 18. I would plan the assessments all at the same time and I would plan the entire curriculum so that there was a synthesis and link between all those different things. Otherwise if we keep going on developing both separately at different times, then it is not the most optimal way of helping children learn.

Q5 **Lucy Powell:** More on the general impact, rather than that, does anyone want to talk to me about some of the evidence and so on?

Liz Bayram: I wanted to elaborate on the point around the quality experiences being really important for children with disadvantage. For me, I think there are two main elements to that. There is a rounded curriculum that looks at their social, emotional and physical development as well as their educational attainment, something that we have within the early years foundation stage. I have concerns that the way we are moving is going to focus more on literacy and numeracy because they are better and easier to measure than perhaps some of the other things. I think that is an important aspect of life chances, having that strong baseline foundation that values all of those things.

I suppose my main issue for today is that quality comes from quality people who are trained, supported and able to do the best job. I think you as a Committee will be aware of the evidence that shows that a highly skilled, quality workforce makes the biggest difference in terms of improved outcomes for our youngest children. I think those are the two bits that I would add.

Q6 **Lucy Powell:** Just for the Committee and for the record, explain a bit more about that. What is the evidence and what does that show?

Liz Bayram: There is a lot of evidence. There is evidence around the EPI research and a number of other research projects about the qualifications of staff. The higher the qualifications of staff, the more improved the outcomes for children, in particular the role of graduates in early years settings, and that is graduates who are in rooms working with children, working with colleagues and leading learning practice. I think the Government's own evaluation of the graduate leadership fund and a number of other studies have shown how much more of an impact that



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has on the quality experiences for children, not just in terms of their language and social and emotional development but in terms of interactions between staff planning and progressing. There are lots more like that.

I think the other part of it is that that qualification, that graduate leadership, gives the whole team in that setting the confidence to be able to work better with parents, to understand that important partnership of working with parents as well.

Q7 Lucy Powell: Okay. I think William is going to ask you a bit more about barriers to that in a minute, but just on that opening question, Beatrice?

Beatrice Merrick: If you like, we have had a bit of a social experiment running for a number of years. We know from that that maintained nursery schools show that those factors are what help close the gap between the most disadvantaged and other children. We know, as was said, it is the highly qualified staff. It is the specialists in early years. It is the integrated working with health and social services across the board, not simply delivering education in a vacuum, and, absolutely vitally, working with families. We know that integrated provision, which is specialist, more expensive but higher quality, has the highest impact. Again, we get that gradient. At the moment, there is an issue in that because there are higher requirements for the maintained sector, schools have to have teachers in nurseries and in primary schools. We see that gradient of quality in the maintained sector: the quality is at least as high or higher in maintained settings, whereas in private and voluntary settings the quality of nursery provision in poorer areas is less good. You have by definition—

Q8 Chair: Why is that? Why is the quality of private and voluntary providers less good?

Beatrice Merrick: Because in more advantaged areas more parents can afford to pay for the non-free provision, and then that subsidises the other provision, so there is more money going into settings to pay staff better so as to have more qualified staff. You have more graduate staff in more advantaged areas. In the PVI sector in less advantaged areas you have far fewer graduate leaders, and that seems to correlate with that difference in quality.

Q9 Chair: Would you not have the same problem? We have a recruitment crisis in schools, particularly in deprived areas. Would that not be the same sort of problem in maintained nurseries in attracting staff?

Beatrice Merrick: There is not a problem in attracting staff to maintained nurseries. In the private and voluntary sector, there is an issue, as was shown by the recent PACEY/Voice survey, about graduates not getting paid graduate rates. Unless settings are funded to pay graduate rates, you need a quality supplement that recognises that you need higher quality staff in more disadvantaged areas to correct for that.



Liz Bayram: There is less incentive in the private and voluntary sector as well as less funding and 30 hours is just making that worse at the moment. The reason basically is that if you are a level 3 practitioner, to move into a graduate role, first, there are very few of them unless they are in schools and, secondly, you do not get much. I think our research showed there was only about a 10% increase in wages as a result of that. What we are finding is that practitioners are leaving the sector. Graduates who are keen to stay in early years are keen to do so in a school-based environment because they can achieve a better balance of work and salary and all of the things that matter as well. Those that are not are moving out of the sector.

Sara's report highlighted that in other places we almost have a little bubble of challenge coming along because the individuals that benefited from the graduate leadership fund 10 or so years ago, like myself, are coming up to the point where they are getting older and in the next 10 to 15 years they may not be in the workforce anymore. We do not have any new graduates coming in. The numbers that are taking on that early years graduate specialism are dropping every year. I think there is a growing challenge for the PVI sector about where these leaders are going to be in five or 10 years from now.

Q10 **Lucy Powell:** Beatrice, do you want to just quickly explain the maintained nursery schools, like how many of them there are, where they are and what makes them different?

Beatrice Merrick: We have 400 schools around England that are just for two, three and four-year-olds. They are statutory maintained local authority-run schools but for children of non-statutory school age. They are extraordinarily successful at the outcomes they get for those children. They have closed the gap. They are mostly located in the most disadvantaged areas and they close the gap for those children. They may be coming in below age-related expectations and going out above them. They are incredibly successful.

They also act as system leaders spreading their expertise across the rest of their sectors locally, and we have lots of wonderful examples of that in Bristol and Newham and around the country. They can be very effective not just for the children in their catchment area but for raising the standard of provision across their local area. Many of them are also integrated with children's centres, in smaller numbers evidently as children's centres close, but again they have a very strong history of that integrated provision working with multiple services. They are a key bit of expertise and they are particularly in danger at the moment because there is not yet a funding settlement in place that guarantees that they can survive. Because it is more expensive to pay for qualified teachers and a qualified head teacher than to pay for level 3s, evidently, but the quality you get is well worth that.

Q11 **Lucy Powell:** Is it 100% that are good or outstanding? Is that right?



Beatrice Merrick: I think that is right, yes.

Q12 **Lucy Powell:** Sara, and then I will pass over the questioning.

Sara Bonetti: I am just going to echo what my colleagues have said. We know that the evidence is clear about the impact of high quality early years, especially for disadvantaged children. I think there are two main points that I would like to make. First, the impact is on both cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. That means that we really need to take a longer-term perspective and not just look at achievement at key stage 1 or key stage 2. Connecting to these early years is one big important piece, but it cannot be considered the only one in tackling disadvantage. Disadvantage comes in many forms. We need a comprehensive set of services. In the same way, early years providers, for how outstanding they are, cannot do everything on their own. They need co-ordination with other social services.

The second point I would like to make it is undeniable that a high quality workforce is key to high quality provision. There are, however, a lot of things that we still do not know. While we should definitely keep as our ultimate goal the idea of having every early years professional highly qualified, we also need to be pragmatic in terms of what it takes to get there. If we are not there yet, what does it take? We are so far behind from that ideal that we really need to look at funding. We really need to look at how we give the incentive to get there. What does the evidence say? We do not know much about training providers. We do not want these providers to just be a label. We want it to be high quality. Then we need to look at all different levels of staffing. Level 3 is very important for ratios and is key in every setting, yet we know that training for level 3 professionals has become more and more expensive over the years. We know that many providers are struggling to have trainees going from level 2 to level 3.

There are so many intermediate steps that we cannot just hope to get there one day. We need a comprehensive set of investments and we definitely need to raise investment in the field to get there. We also need to answer many more questions in terms of staffing structures and how to give those incentives that Liz mentioned in terms of salaries. Providers do not want to pay little, they have to pay little because they cannot afford it. The 30 hours entitlement has put this even more serious financial burden on them.

Lucy Powell: Okay. I am sure we will come back to that.

Q13 **Chair:** Before I come on to William, going back to the private providers in the disadvantaged areas, how many are chains and how many of them are standalone?

Beatrice Merrick: That is a good question. I do not know.

Liz Bayram: I cannot answer that easily off the top of my head. My gut would say that it is more standalone providers.



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Beatrice Merrick: Across the sector as a whole certainly there are more, and you will have some voluntary sector charities running settings in those areas. One of the other issues, of course, is that a lot of council-run provision, which is not schools but council-run day nurseries, in poorer areas we are now seeing a situation where the councils do not have the flexibility to move funding around to subsidise those settings in more disadvantaged areas. Therefore, we are seeing places like Salford where they are in danger of closing, again because they are on council pay and conditions. The staff there tend to be better paid, higher quality, and it is a case of compensating for market failure. You will never get high quality settings working on a free market basis in the poorest areas.

Q14 **Chair:** Where there are chains, do we know if the performance is higher or lower?

Liz Bayram: No.

Beatrice Merrick: I do not know, no.

Q15 **Mr Wragg:** To further our understanding of what high quality early years education is, in terms of the maintained nurseries. They are, as you say, predominantly in areas of deprivation—I am assuming that is by design rather than accident, is that correct?

Beatrice Merrick: Historically, yes, a lot of them were set up by the early campaigners who were looking at trying to improve children's life chances in the poorest areas. Some of them were wartime nurseries, so there is a real mixture, but yes.

Q16 **Mr Wragg:** The model, so to speak, is a model that works?

Beatrice Merrick: Yes.

Q17 **Mr Wragg:** Is that the same for nurseries that are part of primary schools more generally or is it just those standalone nurseries themselves?

Beatrice Merrick: The evidence that there are high numbers of children in deprived areas in primary school nurseries does show that, again, councils are looking at that—maybe there is not sufficient provision in the market so we will have children coming in and we will bring them right through the system within the school, these days from two. That is following Government policy that has been trying to encourage children, particularly disadvantaged two-year-olds, into school nurseries.

Q18 **Mr Wragg:** As I say, if those that are standing alone at a time where LEAs, et cetera, might be looking to consolidate their systems and in a time of funding pressures and so forth, were to be integrated with primary schools, would that be a negative thing to do?

Beatrice Merrick: What happened is 30 years ago there were 600 maintained nursery schools and the 200 that have gone by and large have been amalgamated with primary schools. Although a nursery class



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can be good, the quality can be good, the evidence is they are not as good, the quality is not as high as the standalone maintained where you have a specialist head who really knows the early years. You have specialist staff who do not get moved into year 6 one year and the reception year another year. You have real specialists who do that day in and day out with a large number of children.

- Q19 **Mr Wragg:** It is clear that that standalone model works, but then if we compare it with when they move to primary school, do you find that children moving on from standalone maintained nurseries to primary school, as opposed to children in a nursery within the primary school, fall back or what? Presumably, you say that they lose that focus once they go into the setting of a primary school.

Beatrice Merrick: I do not think there are widespread statistics, but I know a lot of nursery schools track how their children do when they go on into primary school and they do very well at the end of reception year in their scores on the profile. I think there is a view that having got children to a point where they are ready to fly when they leave nursery, doing a lot of good transition work, they do do well. The comment we often get is the degree of independence that children show in nursery schools can be extraordinary. Then they go into a primary school where often less is being expected of them and they are being channelled into much more structured situations where they cannot develop that independence in the same way.

- Q20 **Mr Wragg:** Just as a general question on parental perception of quality provision, does anyone have any brief comment to make on that as a means of ensuring that parents are fully aware?

Liz Bayram: I think it is changing. Obviously, the Ofsted grading is now a very important aspect of parental assumptions of what quality is. The last research I read there was still not much indicator of parents wanting to know the level of qualifications of staff in settings, so that measure of importance is less so for parents. I think there is still a strong component that says if it looks great and it looks like a lovely nursery, it must be a good nursery. From a child-minding point of view, that is a very big challenge to overcome because it is the quality of the children's experiences, the quality of the staff that matters, not how lovely the building blocks are and whether they have a sandpit and all of that. There is a way to go in helping parents to really understand and value what quality means in terms of the interactions that they and their children have with practitioners.

Sara Bonetti: I would add that I think DfE statistics show that it is not the majority of parents that look at Ofsted ratings to decide whether to send their children. Secondly, we need to distinguish between highly educated parents and disadvantaged families. We often see a divide just in terms of how a parent is capable of being an advocate, having the time and ability to get informed and knowing where to get information. Relying only on Ofsted is not common and there is much more work to do in



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terms of how to communicate with parents about what quality is because there is a very different definition of quality.

Beatrice Merrick: Can I stress that we would not want parents to go solely by the Ofsted rating because we know it does not correlate very well with the measures that, for example, researchers will use to look at quality impact on outcomes? We want parents to understand. I think there is a huge public perception that early education childcare is all the same, it is babysitting, anybody can do it. There is no appreciation of this incredibly large knowledge base and expertise that the best practitioners have. We still see it as a career for those who are not academic. It is the hair and care route. We have real issues about diversity in the workforce, seeing it as an aspirational career, and making sure that the people working with our youngest children, understanding their development, understanding how to lead their learning forward, are the best. That goes hand in hand with how we make parents want their children to be in a nursery that is led by graduates who really understand child development.

Q21 **Lucy Allan:** Would a graduate be best? I am slightly perplexed by this. We all want the best possible quality but does quality really go hand in hand with just being a graduate? Is that sufficient?

Liz Bayram: It is an early years specialism.

Q22 **Lucy Allan:** You mean a graduate in childcare?

Liz Bayram: Yes, an early years specialist graduate, not any old graduate.

Lucy Allan: Yes, okay, good, excellent.

Q23 **Thelma Walker:** If we are going to take best practice from early years all the way through, based on your comment about that transition, what would you think about the proposal that we should aim to make sure that reception teachers or professionals and those for year 1—because children, as we know, develop at different stages and phases—have that early years qualification to ensure that we get that best practice? Or, indeed, could we job swap for a certain length of time, so that your early years practitioner can be there but then moves into reception and year 1, keeping that opportunity for professionals but also for those children? I have personally witnessed children moving from early years into reception and then losing outdoor play, losing that experiential learning, and feeling frankly quite traumatised by suddenly being at a desk. What do you think about that?

Beatrice Merrick: One of my colleagues talks about transition of pedagogy, and I think that is what we are really lacking. At the moment, the Government are reviewing the early years foundation stage profile and the early learning goals, but not reviewing the national curriculum at year 1 and year 2, so we do not have that sense of transition. How do children go? The foundation stage is based on where children are



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developmentally and we need a curriculum for year 1 and 2 that carries that forward and allows children to keep that momentum going.

Thelma Walker: Absolutely, yes.

Liz Bayram: I also think from our perspective at PACEY it comes hand in hand with a different approach to the qualification process for teaching. You will not be surprised to hear that that main barrier for progression for most early years teachers is it is not equivalent to a QTS. They cannot teach in reception classes. They cannot lead nurseries because early years professionals and early years teachers are not the same as a qualified teacher.

Q24 **Thelma Walker:** Are you saying you want that addressed?

Liz Bayram: Yes, and certainly our recommendation in our latest report is that we would love the early years teacher status to move to a specialist route to QTS from birth to seven. That would then challenge the current primary early years three-to-seven route and allow teachers in year 1 and year 2 to have that early years appreciation.

Q25 **Thelma Walker:** That is following the Scandinavian model as well, isn't it?

Liz Bayram: Yes.

Q26 **Chair:** Where do you see apprenticeships in all this?

Liz Bayram: Goodness, that is a good question with the current consultation.

Q27 **Chair:** You talked about graduates in early years. What about apprenticeships?

Liz Bayram: I believe that what the early years workforce needs is a clear progression route from apprenticeship right through. The current T level is out for consultation, there is a great debate about where that fits currently. It is unclear at the moment from the consultation whether if you even achieve that T level qualification you would then count in the ratios as a level 3 qualified person. It is at consultation stage. I am sure people will listen, but at the moment apprenticeships eventually get you to the point where you are qualified as an early years teacher. You count in the ratios and there is a progression route there, but the challenge moving from level 3 onwards and upwards, as I previously said, is that the routes are not clear. The funding to allow you to do that or for your employer to pay you more if you do become an early years specialist graduate is just not there. The incentives are not there, and what we hear time and time again is that people love working in early years but it is a really depressing fact that I have heard many a time, and have said, that people say they would love to stay in early years but they can earn more in the supermarket and it is easier. The challenge is to keep people who are really good at their jobs continuing to progress.



Q28 **Chair:** Do you think that the current apprenticeships in childcare produce quality early years practitioners?

Liz Bayram: There is a raging debate about how well they produce quality. A lot depends on the provider. A lot depends also on the experience that that apprentice has in their setting. Are they in a high quality setting so they are working alongside practitioners that show them good practice or not? It is a really complex picture.

Q29 **Chair:** Is that the view of everybody?

Sara Bonetti: I think that goes back to my point. The picture is complex and we cannot just say we all want graduates. We need to understand what happens at the previous level. We do not know much about the quality of training providers. We also do not have an established system of induction, continuing mentoring and coaching and professional development. Going back to international experience, zero to seven is not just the Swedish model, it is now spreading as zero to eight in other countries. There is a reason that comes from child brain development. They are connected stages.

I think there is so much more. For example, in PVIIs it cannot happen at the moment because you cannot just put a highly qualified person in a classroom and expect them to work magic. They need so much more support that teachers have and early years teachers do not. There is so much more there. Abroad again, there are many professional development programmes that have teachers at different levels of the education system working together. It does show how the understanding of the different systems increases and how the systems then work more smoothly. That is needed, just like leadership development. I think it will help teachers to know something about child development because those are the children that then will get to their school. It is so much more complex than just having a graduate and it is also so much more expensive.

Professor Wyse: I wanted to come back to the point made about pedagogy and joining up the different phases. There are some things about early years education and primary education that we know from research evidence are effective. The quality of the teacher/pupil and educator/child interaction is absolutely fundamental. It is fundamental in formal education settings. It is fundamental in the home. I get slightly anxious if we are again demarcating, whether it is birth to seven, birth to eight, too strongly because the children will obviously develop from eight onwards as well. I both agree and just want to add that, really, to the pedagogy point.

Q30 **Emma Hardy:** I want to talk about how we can build on the benefits of early years education throughout the children's time in education and build a little bit on what Dominic said. I admit I am slightly biased with this because I used to work in a nursery and then I became a teacher. I actually introduced year 1 as a transition year and it is something I found



quite successful. You do not have to agree with me, but I do think you are absolutely right about the importance of moving from foundation stage into a formal curriculum. Obviously, my fear at the moment is that year 1 transition year where you took children from foundation through to the formal curriculum has been squashed and will not be able to be maintained for much longer. What do you think? How can we build on the great work that is done in early years right through a child's time in education?

Professor Wyse: I think first of all, the place of research in all this—that is my bias, naturally—is really important. In some aspects, we have huge amounts of evidence, for example in literacy teaching, we know—in my view, strongly—what works, but the problem is then applying that in policy across the nation. That is where the politics has got in the way frequently. I would caution also about the over-reliance on single studies, however impressive they might be. We need to look at 20 years of research in a given area, to sum up what the main messages are. Believe it or not, even on the topic of the teaching of reading, I see rather more consensus these days in the reading laws. Language and literacy are absolutely fundamental, and a good test case for how cohesive we can be from birth to 8 or birth to 18. If we take language, literacy, research and excellent practice, what should that look like? Can we ignore the siren voices, which are not talking on the basis of evidence at all but on ideology? I am not sure if that answers the question, but it is what it made me think about.

Q31 **Emma Hardy:** Can I push you a little, because you are being probably deliberately vague? You are talking about 20 years of research and what really works. What, in your mind, is that?

Professor Wyse: If we take reading, for example. It is perfectly clear that the approach to teaching reading—which means that of practitioners, teachers and parents—has to be rooted in the idea of meaning as central to any literal activity; that the skills, knowledge and understanding around that are vitally important. Things like learning about the alphabetic code are essential, but then so is learning about comprehension and being motivated to read. If you dissociate those, you end up with non-optimal curriculum and teaching. If I had to summarise the big message, it is all about contextualisation and authentic uses of language and literacy.

Sara Bonetti: Pedagogy is not my expertise, but I look at things from a structural point of view. I would like to point out two main points: first, the start age for children in England is much earlier than abroad. That would not necessarily be a problem if we had a smooth transition. The problem is, if we look at, for example, optimal ratios in the classroom, international evidence again is clear about this: that they apply to children zero to five, zero to six. When we look at five-year-olds in England, they are way out of that ratio.



Even just looking at the structural, simple key point of how many children are in a reception class and what the ratio is, is it one to 30 or one to 15? Do they have a teaching assistant? Include in that children with English as a second language, SEN, or any other issue—and that could just be a bad day, because a five year-old has a wide variation of competencies. Thinking about that they are very independent and then they move into reception and they stop being so independent, so the environment is important. That is key, on one side. Again, I would go back to the area of, yes, reception teachers know more about early years, but even the simple ratio and class size is off in England.

Beatrice Merrick: It is an interesting indicator that, if you look at increasing numbers of parents wanting their summer-born children to defer, or the increasing number of exclusions at age five—which I find appalling—that tells you that the reception and year 1 environment is not suited to children. It is not that children are not school-ready; schools are not ready for children.

Q32 **Emma Hardy:** Is there anything key we can do to take the excellent practice in the early years through into other years in the primary curriculum?

Liz Bayram: The point I have already made about ensuring that the teaching profession has that broader understanding of child development in early years is important. I am a strong proposer of the fact that there is a quality of knowledge and experience within the early years workforce that we are losing and missing out on. For that career progression—which I keep banging on about—those could be your future primary teachers, those individuals could move into other sectors. I look at social work and the caring sector, and there is much more structure in those professions to help people who, as Beatrice says, often start with minimum qualifications, who had a bad time at school themselves—but they fly, they become graduates, they can move into teaching and do all of these other things. Without that structure to help them to do that, we lose the benefit of their knowledge and experience that could extend into a more integrated education system for our younger children.

Q33 **Emma Hardy:** I want to ask you a really quick question now: if there was one thing you could get primary teachers to do which early years practitioners do really well, what would you tell them to do?

Professor Wyse: If I can start, maybe. I would tell them to watch and understand the quality of the interaction between the educator and the child. When it is at its real best, it is quite moving. I wanted to say something about, yes, we know what fantastic early years practice looks like, but the best of primary practice has many similarities. Good teaching is about the big picture, which is very high-quality interaction, really well-informed and knowledgeable people, is it not? We must be careful: it is bad to have the primary phases unduly and unreasonably impacting negatively on the early years, but the reverse could be true, could it not? You do not want the assumption that everything in primary education is a



disaster and that everything in early years is superb. I know you are not saying that but I am being deliberately—

Sara Bonetti: I would turn the question around and say, “What can we do to allow primary teachers to do the best, which they know how to do already?” just the same as in the early years. It really is a matter of letting them focus on interaction. They know how to build on pre-literacy skills and pre-maths skills, and they are trained and competent. It goes back to interaction and knowing the child. High staff turnover does not help to build trust and a relationship and getting to know the children, so they need to be put in the condition to do that.

Beatrice Merrick: One aspect of the early years curriculum, which is being used throughout primary, and even in secondary in some areas, is the characteristics of effective learning, and that is looking at the how to learn not the what to learn. There are examples you can look at where primary schools have used that to encourage children to look at the curriculum in a slightly different way.

Liz Bayram: I would just echo that. Within early years the ratios are smaller, you have more time to know, and have quality experiences with, that child. It could be a wonderful place to be able to extend that and allow that time in more of a way within primary too.

Professor Wyse: The other good thing about what you were saying about metacognition is that works also in the areas of discipline, doesn’t it? In the teaching of writing, for example, we know that kind of ability to think about your own development is really important, so it works—

Chair: Can I ask you to speak into the microphone?

Professor Wyse: Yes, sorry.

Q34 **Chair:** Just before I come on to my colleague, Lucy Allan, there have been suggestions that all the benefits of good early years intervention can fade away if there are not continuous interventions all the way through in terms of character and education and so on. What is your view about that?

Beatrice Merrick: I think there was a report from Harvard recently—it was one of these metastudies—which showed—

Q35 **Chair:** It is called “fadeouts”, I think.

Beatrice Merrick: Yes. It queried that. There is a lot of evidence that there is a long-term effect. It may depend what you are measuring and when you measure it, but they seem to be saying, no, that there is enough strong evidence now that we do not believe this fadeout phenomenon is of any—

Q36 **Chair:** Right, okay. So the advantages that you get from good early interventions stay with you—even if you come from a significantly-disadvantaged background—all the way through?



Beatrice Merrick: Yes.

Sara Bonetti: I think I would elaborate: it is a misconception that is brought forward by misinterpretation of the evidence; Heckman picked up on this point. There are two key points again, not to avoid it, but to understand what is called “fadeout.” The first is: human development is multidimensional, so if we only measure student achievement with a test score, we are not going to consider all of the development that occurs; and later in life, most of the time. Secondly, just because early years education is a good investment, it does not mean then that we need to stop there. Those programmes that pay off build on the early years investment, so we need continuous development throughout the course of a person’s life. Of course, it is a good investment because prevention costs less and makes successive investment less burdensome, but it needs to take a longer-term holistic approach, and then evidence is clear that there is no fadeout effect in that sense.

Q37 **Lucy Allan:** I would like to ask about the number of educational hours per week needed in the early years, because we are certainly moving from the 15 to the 30, and the 30 was intended as free childcare rather than educational. I am questioning whether it is a good thing to be starting formal education much earlier now that we are focusing on the 30 hours. How many educational hours do you think are necessary within the early years framework, Liz?

Liz Bayram: There is lots of evidence that, for children, 15 hours was the optimal amount that allowed them to do well. You have hit the nail on the head: the 30 hours is funded places, certainly not free, and is more about supporting families back into work and that balance than it is about the quality of the education that children are receiving. I am not the best expert on how many hours are right; it depends on the child, the quality of the interactions they have at home, and all those other factors as well, so I will bow to others. There is a real difference between early education experiences and what we are moving to now, which is support to stay in work and balance family.

Q38 **Lucy Allan:** Presumably, all the social skills, and any other benefits of being in a strong quality educational setting, are what is important rather than a requisite number of hours of education. Beatrice, what is your view?

Beatrice Merrick: I think Ted Melhuish, in your next session, will be the absolute expert on this, but briefly, the EPI study showed that 15 hours a week was optimal. This later SEED study seems to be suggesting that under 35 hours a week is fine for children, does not have adverse effects, but over 35 hours a week possibly does have some adverse effects. It is not just about the number of hours. We know that there is lots of evidence that starting early years nursery education, not formal education but a nursery experience for two-year-olds, has been very positive for the two-year-old offer, and three and four-year-olds; that the



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earlier you start, the better, and the intensity of the impact, so that the number of hours does make a difference.

It is important that you arrange things around the needs of a two or a three-year-old, which does not mean 10 hours on two days a week and none on another; it is far better to have it evenly-spaced, regular, routine, so that children know what to expect, and are not in settings for very long hours. We know that is the reality for many working parents, that one has to put one's children in that situation, but if one was looking at it purely from the benefits to the child, independent of the economics of the family, one would probably be saying something like half a day a week, or a school day, six hours a day, rather than 10-hour-long days.

The other side of that is in relation to the 30 hours, which we will maybe come onto. Now that we are seeing children who are not eligible for 30 hours having just 15 hours, we are seeing the gap increasing, anecdotally. We will get data on this in due course, but we have to be aware that, if children in working families are getting 30 hours and children in non-working families are getting 15 hours, we will see, probably, an increase in the gap.

Q39 Lucy Allan: Sara, do you think we are starting too early by having 30 hours, with too much emphasis on education?

Sara Bonetti: I do not agree on this differentiation between care and education: it comes from this common misconception that education means formal teaching. Children start learning when they are in the womb, so they are constantly going through the process of education, from day one. It depends on how you do it. The two are not separable, hence I do not think there is a time that is better to start or not. Evidence shows that, the earlier you start, the better, if it high-quality provision: if it is play-based, child-centred, et cetera. It is more mixed in terms of hours per week; there does not seem to be a great difference between 15 hours or 30 hours, but the reality is we work, parents work, children need to be somewhere, in care and learning experiences, so I do not think that is quite relevant at this point. The relevant part is not splitting the two sides; teachers would all say there is no such thing as separation and doing 15 hours of care and then 15 hours of education.

The first year is quite different from the following year, but if we also just look at it from the point of view of maternal employment, why do we not have an entitlement that starts after maternity leave? Why, for age one to two, does it not matter where they are? It is much more complex than that.

Professor Wyse: I defer to other people who are more knowledgeable about this, but I do think the complexity is about not just the children's needs but those of the family, and its values. If one could offer as much high-quality early education in care as possible then parents and families could have the right amount of choice over that, but, beyond that, I defer to you all and to others to follow.



Sara Bonetti: The truth is that parental choice is not real, oftentimes. We keep talking about parental choice but the elephant in the room is they do not have a real choice in terms of where to send their child, where to find a provider with flexible hours, whether to have more flexible working arrangements to stay home and not send a child for four to five hours.

Chair: Just gently, if I could ask you to be brief, because it is really invaluable, but we have a lot of you and a lot of questions. Thelma?

Q40 **Thelma Walker:** You will notice I have been nodding vigorously along with an awful lot of what you have been saying because, in terms of educational philosophy, we are on the same page. We have been talking a lot about the workforce and upskilling it and having the best possible practice. Let us imagine we are in an ideal world, that we have all the funds and resources we need, what would you like to see happen to enable us to have that best possible practice and the most skilled-up professionals we could ever have? What is the one thing, or two maybe, that you would like to see happen? Shall we start with you, Liz?

Liz Bayram: Two things—I sound like I am repeating myself. Sustainable funding for early years education places that allows investment in that workforce. The vast majority of children are in PVI providers, and that 30 hours is not covering the cost of them delivering a quality place, and they are struggling. Secondly, that career progression from the moment you think about becoming somebody who works in an early years setting, right through and beyond to wherever you may end up wanting to be. There are too many barriers and things that stop you being able to move forward. For me, those are the two core components that would provide that baseline.

Beatrice Merrick: Yes, I would agree. You have to fund it properly; you cannot get the quality of staff unless you fund it. Also, what we needed to do was to set it out very clearly in the Nutbrown review, and it was a real missed opportunity. That set out this idea of having QTS zero to seven, of aiming for the workforce to move to everybody being level 3-qualified as a minimum. I do think we need to look at the quality of level 3, because we get very mixed feedback about the standard of level 3-qualified professionals coming through the system at the moment. Yes, you could look to the Nutbrown review for a quick recipe of what we need to do.

Sara Bonetti: Yes, no need to reinvent the wheel: I would also go back to the Nutbrown review.

Professor Wyse: Yes, I agree very much with what has been said. I would target the investment into the training and development of excellent teachers, and we also need to think hard about continuing professional development, right across the teaching workforce. A rather interesting report came out about the years of the national literacy strategy, for example, which, although it has been wrongly described as the effects of synthetic phonics, when you look into the detail, you see



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there was a holistic programme of early years literacy and a really quite effective local authority-led national rollout of professional development and training. I am personally engaged in my Department with teacher education and training right across all the different routes and phases, so I clearly think that is a massively important area, but continuing professional development is one we need to keep our eye on as well.

- Q41 **Thelma Walker:** You are all really talking about a commitment to having that quality training. There was a comment from Beatrice earlier that there was also the attitude to early years being childcare. We have said that many parents do not have a real choice—because they need to go to work for a certain length of time—so we need to change attitudes towards the profession and that early years setting. It is absolutely crucial, if we are talking about life chances, and so we get those highly-qualified professionals and we change people's attitudes towards early years. Thank you very much.

Professor Wyse: Can I just add one tiny other thing?

Chair: A quick point, please.

Professor Wyse: The engagement between parents, educators and teachers is really important, and building those partnerships in some structural ways as well.

- Q42 **Chair:** Thank you. You may have seen that Eleanor Harding, the education correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, today highlights the underutilisation of childcare by disadvantaged families. She reports that British educational research found that poor children were 13 percentage points less likely to attend for the full five terms of free preschool education than children from higher income families. The figures that I have say something like 67,000 families are not making use of the 15-hour two-year-old offer available to them. Is this because it is so complex? What are your reasons for why this is happening and what can be done about it?

Liz Bayram: Let me speak quickly. There are some areas where that label of disadvantage would put you off bringing your child into that setting to take that service up. There is a lot to be argued around universality, because when you look at the three and four-year-olds, there is not that gap; it is 99%, point whatever, of take-up. There is something around labelling. That programme is, in relative terms, new. Year-on-year, the numbers are growing slowly, but early education for three and four-year-olds has been going for many years; it takes time to establish it. There is an argument around universality of provision not being seen as disadvantaged and labelled in a particular way, that may put some families off.

- Q43 **Chair:** If the most disadvantaged families—whose children would probably benefit most—are not accessing, it almost defeats the whole purpose of offering childcare in the first place.



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Beatrice Merrick: There is evidence that some local authorities have done a really good job about reaching out and getting a very high proportion of families on board, and others much less so. Sometimes it is about lack of quality provision, so you might have a borough where there is, on paper, enough two year-old provision, but it is not in the right places for those families. I slightly hesitate; there is a view that sometimes it is a cultural issue—it may or may not be—particularly when it is advertised as childcare. I do not need someone to look after my two-year-old, I do that; they will go to education when they are ready, but if you advertise it as childcare not education, parents may say, “Why do I need to farm my child out to someone else?” It is a complex mix of availability, people understanding why it is there. Sometimes we have to be realistic about what the family circumstances are; are they feeling that it does benefit them? Are they interested in trying to retrain, to have opportunities to get onto the job market? Is that an issue? Do they have other complexities that they are trying to deal with and getting the child into the two-year-old provision is low down the list? We do not really know enough, but yes, it is, yes, these are complex services.

Q44 **Chair:** Is that the complexity of the subsidy system they get because it is different in different places? Is that a contributory factor?

Beatrice Merrick: No, because it is free on delivery, so that is not an issue, I do not think, so much as just knowing it is there and that it is free.

Q45 **Chair:** What would you do to solve this problem?

Beatrice Merrick: Look at where local authorities have done really well and try to spread that. Possibly also look at whether it would be more effective as a universal provision. The thing that has been really missing with the two-year-old offer is that it was just funding for the child to be in a setting for 15 hours, not to work with the parents. Almost everybody who has funded two-year-olds will say, “We could really do with some funding for some family support work to work with the parents as well.” In a way, it would be helpful if it was almost billed more as, “It could be a mixture of leave your two year-old, or stay and play.” It is not a very flexible model, and maybe what people need is a more flexible range of choices.

Q46 **Lucy Powell:** Overall, do you think that, however well intended, current Government policy has skewed things away from the focus on supporting disadvantaged families and closing the gap to maybe, as you were saying earlier, extending that gap by offering more and more support to those who are already advantaged? Is that a fair—

Chair: I wanted to add to that. What is your assessment of the growing difference caused by of the fact that employed people now can have the 30 hours—so this could apply to a family earning £200,000 a year, those who are not employed, or some parents who want to stay at home, or whatever it may be? Is the attainment gap growing for the disadvantaged



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because of this policy?

Beatrice Merrick: Yes. Anecdotally, we have people concerned that it is. We also have some boroughs and local authorities—mainly in metropolitan areas in Manchester, London and Birmingham, for example—that used to offer fulltime places, where the most disadvantaged children got 25 or 30 hours a week. They have now lost that and it is the more advantaged working families who are getting that. We have the double-disadvantaged in some areas, because local authorities do not have the flexibility, and I think we will start to see that coming through in the figures. At the moment, we do not have hard data.

Q47 **Lucy Powell:** Do you think the Government needs to take stock and think about its overall strategy in terms of narrowing the gap in the early years?

Beatrice Merrick: There is a tension. I understand the desire to support working families to get people into employment, and to address the fact that we have so many working families in poverty, but, under all flavours of Government, we have had a real drive for quantity at the expense of quality. There has been a huge push to increase numbers for three and four-year-olds, for two-year-olds, et cetera, to the 30 hours, without saying, “Can the sector keep up and keep the quality up?” Does the funding stretch far enough?

Q48 **Chair:** If you reduced the threshold to £60,000, you could free up £150 million, which you could then spend on the most disadvantaged group. Could that be one way to do it?

Beatrice Merrick: It would help a bit. I have not done the maths, whether it would be enough, but it would certainly help.

Q49 **Lucy Powell:** Help fund free childcare.

Beatrice Merrick: Yes. My guess is it would take quite a lot more than that to really see a difference, so as if you took the total quantum of £6 billion and said, “How would you best spend that?” There was a review of childcare in Scotland, where they looked at the possibility of graded charges, so a certain amount would be free and then above a certain amount you would pay a little bit according to income, which is quite a common European model. We have not really looked at imaginative systems like that. At the moment it has been, “Let us get more on 30 hours, let us get more two-year-olds” but not looking at whether the sector can deliver—

Liz Bayram: What we have done is added to the current system without stepping back and thinking, “What is the long-term vision, and does that system deliver it? Are there different ways in which we could approach it?” Your question about supporting less-well-off families and giving more money is about how that long-term vision and commitment allows you to do that, and where you want to end up. That is the challenge. There is



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not a shared understanding of where we want to get to, and therefore the map to achieve that.

Beatrice Merrick: At the moment, if you are a setting, and you can either take more children on the 30 hours or more disadvantaged two-year-olds, very often people will look at the funding for the two-year-olds and say, "Because the ratios are higher that is more expensive, the funding does not cover it, we will have fewer two-year-olds, we will have more families, we will have more 30-hour children." That is going to work against the mission to improve life chances.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, that was very helpful. We will have a short break before the next witnesses.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Kevan Collins, Laura McFarlane, Steven McIntosh, and Professor Edward Melhuish.

Q50 **Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming. Could you introduce yourselves—from our left to right—and your positions, for the benefit of the tape?

Sir Kevan Collins: My name is Kevan Collins. I am the Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation.

Laura McFarlane: My name is Laura McFarlane. I am a Director for the National Children's Bureau, running one of the "A Better Start" programmes in Lambeth.

Professor Melhuish: I am Edward Melhuish. I am Professor of Human Development at the University of Oxford, and also Birkbeck, University of London.

Steven McIntosh: I am Steven McIntosh. I am a Director of UK Poverty Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns for Save the Children.

Chair: Thank you. Lucy?

Q51 **Lucy Powell:** Thank you. Thanks all for coming. As I said to the previous panel, we will be very nice to you, do not worry. We are just here to pluck out of your brains your knowledge and things that we need to take our inquiry forward. Some of you heard some of the previous panel, and we are talking to you particularly about parental support and the home environment as well. Just more broadly, to kick off for us, would each of you say a little bit about what you think some of the clear evidence is about what works in the early years, both at home and in provision, and what some of the priorities should be for supporting what we know works going forward? Kevan, do you want to start off?

Sir Kevan Collins: Yes. The evidence on early years is growing; it is still not as extensive as we would like, to be able to answer a question like that as clearly as I would like to with the empirical evidence. There are four very strong bits of evidence, particularly around the life chances of the most disadvantaged children. For me, they are the absolute importance of strong and stable relationships with adults; a focus in provision on opportunities to build self-regulation and self-control—and I think that is through play—the central value of language and communication as a fundamental building block for future learning; and the opportunity to be physically active, which is often ignored. They seem to be four evidence-based priorities for promoting the very best opportunities for young children.

Q52 **Lucy Powell:** What do you think we can do to promote that to enable that, and are we doing that?



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Sir Kevan Collins: As ever, in English education in its broader sense, there is an obsession with structures and with arrangements, rather than the actual quality of the provision. Early years is no different to the rest of the system in that we have far too much variation. One of the things we must do is reduce the amount of variation by nature of the setting that you go to. We have settings that are world-leading, but we have too many that are not, as with schools. We have too much variation within settings in the quality of experience you get from different adults, because the training is variable. This means within the same setting you have wonderful provision and then you have, dare I say, mediocre provision. The focus is on reducing variation between settings and improving the quality of support within. That is where I would focus my attention.

Laura McFarlane: We heard a lot in the previous session about what goes on in provision. Thinking about the home learning environment and supporting parents as the first educators of children, we are delivering across the country a programme called REAL, so Raising Early Achievement in Literacy. This equips practitioners in settings to then go into the home and support parents, very broadly, in terms of encouraging and supporting their child's learning. Digging more deeply into that and really understanding—and we can say a bit more later about this—how we support parents right from the antenatal period and throughout, in terms of their understanding of the stages of their child's development and how they can best support that in an ongoing way, so harnessing parents' and community skills in supporting the very youngest children.

Q53 **Lucy Powell:** Ted, you are one of the other evidence experts at the table. What would you say?

Professor Melhuish: Our research supports the points made by Kevan and Laura. Additionally, I would say that, of the kinds of model of early years provision that we could provide in the future, the children-centred model, when it is delivered appropriately, can be extremely effective. We have identified six primary schools around the country which are outperforming other primary schools very substantially. Those six primary schools all have a form of early years provision attached to them. We are currently looking for money to do case studies on these six centres to see what puts them ahead of all the other centres in the county.

When we look in our research at what affects the quality in provision, a cheap way of improving quality quite rapidly is professional development. Most staff in early years settings are under-trained and professional development is a fairly cheap way of upping the quality substantially pretty quickly.

On the earlier question about hours, the short answer to that is: 15 hours a week for the general population but, for the bottom 20%, there is good evidence that 30 hours could be beneficial for them. Unfortunately, the current offer of 30 hours excludes those workers' households who are the most in need of that 30 hours.



Chair: We are doing it exactly the wrong way round.

Lucy Powell: Steven?

Steven McIntosh: Thanks for the opportunity to give evidence, and for the Committee's focus on educational opportunities and life chances, which do not just begin and end with school, and this critical early years period.

As a tiny bit of context, it is interesting to look at the broader picture of disadvantage. When you look at overall figures of financial disadvantage, it is preschool children who are in households most likely to experience financial disadvantage. The fastest risers, and the highest levels of poverty and financial disadvantage, are among those households with a child under five, where it is a rate of around 35%, as opposed to a lower rate for children of school age. Given all the evidence that we have heard about the critical importance of the early years, this adds to the importance of taking action at that time because those children are most likely to be—

Q54 **Lucy Powell:** So you are even more likely to be in a disadvantaged family when you are under five?

Steven McIntosh: Indeed. That is for a variety of factors around parental employment, which are understandable, but point to some of the ways in which we need to ensure this is tackled. From Save the Children's perspective, we would absolutely emphasise the evidence we have already heard on high-quality childcare as one of the key routes to tackling disadvantage and improving children's life chances.

We would argue that, not because there are not other critical interventions that you can make, through a variety of support through local areas, or to dispute the fact that parenting and the home learning environment always comes first in a child's development, but when you are looking for practical access routes to reaching the most disadvantaged families—given the variability and the quality of different support in different local areas—then the childcare system is the optimal way of reaching those families.

We have in excess of 95% of three and four-year-olds accessing childcare. It is a prime route for Government to pull levers which are within its power to improve the life chances of the poorest children. It absolutely comes down to the childcare system, and that evidence which shows that high-quality graduate-led childcare can have a really transformative impact on children's school readiness, and as a foundation for their future educational opportunities and life chances.

Q55 **Lucy Powell:** Just before we move on—and I am sure we will come back to this—in terms of current Government policy, there was going to be the life chances strategy a couple of years ago, and that never really materialised. Do you think that Government policy is focused enough on transforming life chances in those early years for the most



disadvantaged, or do you think we have seen—however well intentioned—for other reasons, a skewing away from that, and it might open up that gap a bit further? Kevan?

Sir Kevan Collins: We have a bit of a car crash on our hands, in the sense that the evidence is clear that high-quality early education makes a difference, and we are giving the most high-quality early education to people who, in a sense, already have advantage. How that will not lead to widening the gap is difficult to see. Already at the beginning, when children are five, we have a four and a half month gap in their learning, now we are giving extra hours to people for more learning who already have advantage. That is a problem.

The other thing we know is that the high-quality early years education matters most to those who come from more disadvantaged communities; you are compensating for something so they make even more from it. We heard earlier how one of the perverse, and I think unintended, consequences of policy, you are seeing children who were disadvantaged who are getting more than 15 hours, having it reduced so other children, who are getting support for their 30 hours, have a place. That has to be a problem for all of us in the long run if you are trying to narrow the gap.

Q56 **Lucy Powell:** Sorry, could I just ask Ted that question?

Professor Melhuish: Yes, I would agree with what Kevan has just said. I would further add that it is a general principle—certainly true in primary school and in early years—that the children who benefit most from high-quality teaching are the lowest ability, most disadvantaged children. We have done analysis of every child in the country in primary schools and we find that how they are affected by the effectiveness or quality of teaching in their school varies dramatically on their ability level at the start of school. High ability children do pretty well, even if the teaching is not very good, but low ability children vary enormously in their outcomes, depending on the quality of teaching. The lesson is, throughout the education system, put your highest quality teachers with your lowest ability children, and your most deserving children, because that is where you will get your biggest pay off. Exactly the opposite happens within the educational system.

Steven McIntosh: On the specifics, we had a lot on the critical evidence, which shows the importance of high quality, but specifically on what Government policy is doing to address that, particularly with the graduate-led workforce. It feels like a real blind spot for Government in that we saw some good principles for the social mobility action plan, which talked about flowing resources to those areas which have benefited least from some education reforms, and we know that nurseries, particularly those in the private and voluntary sector in the poorest areas, are likely to be less good quality, but also less likely to employ a graduate. There is clear evidence there that is an example of where policy has not delivered the kinds of outcomes on that investment in quality.



Government promised in the early years workforce strategy last year that there would be a feasibility study on how to grow their graduate workforce. They have now missed their own deadline in doing that. Given all the evidence, given the fact there is a clear case for the poorest areas, it is not acceptable that we have not seen a plan to set out what those options would be for growing a graduate workforce, for digging down into the reasons why we are seeing so many people leaving the early years workforce, and why recruitment is so low.

Save the Children, in the aspiration of getting a full workforce of graduate-led nurseries, think there is a gap of around 10,000 early years teachers that are needed. You would obviously start in the poorest areas first but, given that number—and we are only seeing last year around 595 people applying for the early years initial teacher training—there is a huge gap between the number of people who are entering training for that critical role and the need to deliver it.

Both in how you focus resources and those key staff in the poorest areas, and in overall entry routes to the graduate workforce, we simply are not seeing enough action, and Government needs to publish urgently.

Q57 Chair: We will come on to you in a minute, Thelma. You are talking about graduates again, so I just want to get your views on apprenticeships in childcare and their value to early years practice.

Steven McIntosh: Save the Children are shortly going to publish a piece of research that looks at the barriers to employing early years teachers and graduates in nurseries from a range of different backgrounds; the things that are not freeing up staff who are at lower-level qualifications from training within the workplace, but also those entry routes. I am definitely going to come back to you on the apprenticeships route, but it is clear from both directions there simply is not enough structured support—

Q58 Chair: What I am trying to understand is whether you believe that you could get high-quality teaching and early years practitioners from the apprenticeship route.

Professor Melhuish: I do not think there is any evidence about it at all; it is a completely blank slate, nobody knows the answer.

Steven McIntosh: We definitely want it to be investigated, but I have not seen the evidence yet on that specific route.

Sir Kevan Collins: Ted is right, we have not evaluated that, but, equally, I am nervous about the direct correlation that, because you graduated, you are somehow going to be a better practitioner. What we know is the qualifications, the skills, really matter, but we also need to not lose sight of the aptitude for the job and training on the job for the job. I personally would be very interested in exploring the potential of an apprenticeship route into this, and other professions, including teaching itself.



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Q59 **Chair:** There are apprenticeships in childcare at the moment and they are successful. Would you accept that?

Sir Kevan Collins: Exactly.

Professor Melhuish: I accept that. Yes, certainly it works in some professions and it could well work in the early years profession, but we do not know.

Q60 **Chair:** On the very important point you just made a moment ago, that you need to get the best teachers for the most disadvantaged children, how do you do that?

Professor Melhuish: Pay incentives.

Q61 **Chair:** Do you think it is entirely down to pay?

Professor Melhuish: Certainly, that is an effective strategy. I am not saying there are not other things, but pay incentives would be the easiest way to do this.

Sir Kevan Collins: Interestingly, at schools where there is evidence on this, pay works to a certain point, but what attracts people to work in schools of high challenge is the notion that they will be well-supported there to grow and develop. A large number of very well-qualified teachers want to go and work in our most desperate and difficult communities because they know they will be supported. They are very reluctant to go there if they think they are going to flounder on the rocks and be left alone with difficult circumstances.

By the way, one of the things that was mentioned earlier that I want to come back on is that if you take the foundation stage profile, which is the measure at the end of the foundation stage, the correlation between reading and long-term success and life chances is very secure. All this work on early years not only matters in itself but it is one of the strongest early predictors we have that someone's life chances will be challenged if they do not have particularly literacy and language underway by the end of the foundation stage.

Steve McIntosh: Just to respond to the question about how you get graduates in the poorest areas—

Chair: Not just graduates.

Steve McIntosh: Not just graduates, overall workforce indeed. We will certainly send the Committee the evidence we are publishing shortly based on interviews with providers and a range of early years staff. It is a range of things.

Pay and status unquestionably are key drivers for people selecting their career choices and choosing whether they progress or whether they leave the profession. However, there is also evidence that providers are not aware of the impact of certain levels of qualification, in understanding



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what the career path looks like and the impact that could have on their setting, that there are financial incentives from Government to allow employees to be freed up from their work, which backfill that support with providers, which will allow them to continue with training. Equally, there is ongoing professional development that is important. Once you have the qualification, support it after that.

Q62 Chair: Finally, the Oxford University Press suggested that 49% of year 1 pupils have vocabulary difficulties that limit their learning, as do 43% of year 7 pupils. It seems to be an astonishingly high figure in a developing country. We are supposed to be the fourth or fifth largest economy in the world. Why is that and how do we compare with other developed countries?

Professor Melhuish: The reason is that reading and literacy levels later on are heavily dependent on language development levels, which Kevan mentioned earlier, in the pre-school period. If you measure language development at the start of school, it is one of the biggest predictors of literacy level at the end of school. Getting language environments improved in the pre-school period is critical to long-term outcomes for children.

Q63 Chair: How do we compare with other countries?

Sir Kevan Collins: Most developed countries do have a relationship, obviously, between children coming from more affluent families and more disadvantaged backgrounds. We have a particularly steep line in England. If you take our top end, the ones that come with great advantage, they do really well compared to anyone around the world. This is why, in a sense, the debate about, dare I say, grammar schools is not really worthy. Those children do really well at the top end in England compared to other countries. The children at the bottom end do relatively poorly. You have a very steep incline in England.

Q64 Chair: What I am trying to understand is the figure of 49% for year 1 and 43% for year 7. Is that much higher or about the same level as developed countries?

Sir Kevan Collins: It is lower than some of the home countries in Great Britain at the beginning but the—

Q65 Chair: France, Europe?

Sir Kevan Collins: There is not much between them. The English speaking countries that seem to have a slightly flatter line are some of the provinces in Canada, Ontario has done very well, British Colombia has done well. Australia has a very steep—

Q66 Chair: Eastern Europe?

Sir Kevan Collins: Eastern Europe? I don't know the Eastern Europe figures.



- Q67 Thelma Walker:** If we go back to the home environment where children are growing up, we want children and adults to have empathy, trust and strong attachments. How can we support parents to deliver and to give their children that nurturing sensitive parenting? What can we do? What interventions, what help?

Laura McFarlane: I think it is very important to start to think about children antenatally. There are some programmes that we are delivering, some of the Better Start programmes, which are very focused on antenatal education, mentalising and thinking about your child into the future. The foundation of all learning is built on the quality of the relationship with your parent or your primary caregiver. If there is something that is going to interrupt that or disturb that, it is a matter of offering support from trained psychotherapists and psychologists to really amend and fix that relationship.

More broadly, being very open, holistic and inviting parents particularly to participate in programmes like REAL and other programmes that start from the parents' inherent desire to want to do the best for their children. In a sense, it is a very different from a programme that is offered as a parenting programme. If you are offering a programme that is addressing how you can help your children learn better, it is much more likely to be taken up. Parents are supported. A home visit is critically part of that programme and thinking—

- Q68 Thelma Walker:** Is that happening?

Laura McFarlane: Yes, that is happening in different parts of the country, in Lambeth, for example. It is challenging because early years educators and practitioners are taken out of ratio to go and do those home visits, but I have seen the impact to a child that was visited at home by its key worker and the difference in the relationship. The child said to her, "You came to my house" and that unlocked some of the difficulty that was going on.

- Q69 Thelma Walker:** You talked about holistic support. How do education and health support overlap and come together? It is not just one thing, is it?

Laura McFarlane: No, absolutely it is not. In terms of the future direction of early years policy, obviously we do regret the loss of funding for children's centres, which did enable education, health and social care to work more closely—

- Q70 Thelma Walker:** A 40% drop since 2000.

Laura McFarlane: Yes, and we are awaiting, in a sense, policy direction on children's centres and there are very different scenarios in different boroughs up and down the country.

The integrated two-year-old check is challenging because the language that education and health speak, even about the same child, is very



difficult. The workforce approach in terms of more integrated training, more co-location of staff will help that. Sharing REAL with parents—REAL is one of the programmes that we are doing and we are offering parents the opportunity to learn about early education and then share that with other parents—that kind of volunteer, peer-support model seems to be working well in some areas.

Sir Kevan Collins: One of the interesting things about the parent's piece is that it is unarguable now after decades of evidence that parental engagement makes a difference. We know very little in rigorous evidence what works in that endeavour, particularly in getting the harder to reach parents involved in education and the support and care of their children. We need to do more work on that. We are running, with about 1,000 early years settings around the country, different randomised control trials.

Q71 **Thelma Walker:** Do you have some examples of success stories?

Sir Kevan Collins: We do have examples. An interesting study we are doing is called EasyPeasy where parents receive videos once a week of games you might play with your children. That has already been tested. It was proven effective. It sounds strange that you have to send a parent a game to play but it was how you convert your living room into a safari park and you build language. You build better use of adjectives and describing words in order to get the game going. What we are seeing in many families is the number of words is low but also the type of language is also restricted. That is one where we had good impact.

We did a study with Kathy Sylva on SPOKES, which was very well regarded but it did not have the impact we expected. We need to use rigorous evaluation of these methods. Lots of things are happening that have not properly been evaluated.

The other important bit of evidence to put in the picture here is that when you measure the amount of discretionary spend that parents are now placing on their child's life beyond the care, it is exponential for those who already have wealth. There is an income support question actually. Parents with low incomes need the resources to allow them to do the things with their children other people are doing. That is an important point.

One interesting last example of a survey we have done: one in 10 children, we believe, in England who are not reading well have not had eye problems properly diagnosed. So there is a link and it is very practical. It is not integration of this, that and the other, it is testing children's eyesight, which has dropped off the agenda. We have now seen one in 10 kids in Bradford with reading problems that had not had eye problems diagnosed. This is backed up by a study in Baltimore. There are lots of practical things we need to do as well, quite rightly, involve parents in a deeper understand of their child's—



Q72 **Thelma Walker:** But those are barriers to children?

Sir Kevan Collins: It is a fundamental barrier to reading, if you cannot see.

Q73 **Thelma Walker:** Absolutely, yes. Any other thoughts on that?

Professor Melhuish: The children's centre model is certainly demonstrably effective with the most disadvantaged groups when it is implemented properly. I can give you examples from around the country where a fully implemented children's centre model produces excellent results in the start of school assessments and those children also do very well throughout the primary school. It has to be implemented well in order to work. Graham Stuart's committee reporting at the end of 2014 on children's centres essentially came to the same conclusion.

Parenting is essentially a learned skill. You learn it from how your parents treat you, from how your neighbours treat their children and how your sister treats her child and so on. One of the things that happens with disadvantaged groups is we have great clustering of disadvantaged groups in disadvantaged areas where they learn often dysfunctional behaviours from each other. If disadvantaged families were distributed more evenly around the country, you would get more models of good parenting available for disadvantaged groups and things will improve as a whole.

Q74 **Ian Mearns:** It is socialisation—is that what you are saying?

Professor Melhuish: We would have to change housing policy to do that.

Another idea is to take "EastEnders", put a young mother on "EastEnders" with a young baby, have her demonstrate good parenting behaviours on the screen. I think that would be a very powerful learning technique because people learn a lot of their skills from what they see their heroes doing.

Steve McIntosh: I fully agree on the critical importance of the home learning environment but also that we do not yet have clear evidence on the specific interventions that work and critically how to scale them and get wider access, not just within local areas. We very much welcome the work the EEF and the Lottery Fund are doing investing in that kind of innovation to understand what works. Save the Children runs programmes both around parenting and support through schools, around supporting that kind of interaction to give parents the tips and tools to take home. We have done ethnographic research to understand the habits and customs within the home that drive particularly disadvantaged families to do less of the important early learning behaviours. It is of little surprise to the Committee, I am sure, but a family context of stressful lives where financial pressures are dictating many of the behaviours, the lack of time, often parents are in coping mode, they are thinking about just keeping their kids happy now rather than a long-term focus on their



future and investing in that. Parents who themselves may have had a difficult time in education and therefore are resistant to educational messages are also less likely to listen to messengers reflecting the school system, from Government, indeed from organisations like Save the Children, so they are singularly unreceptive to the sorts of messages that can be seen as lecturing about their child's educational advantage, as well as all the factors around pressured finances, meaning that housing and health, nutrition are an impact.

What that teaches us about what the solutions look like is that we need to go to where families are rather than expecting them to come to us. Save the Children is doing work particularly on a programme called Wonder Words, around behaviour change, which is how you can reach those families through, for example, smartphones, looking at chatbots, not designed to get the kids on to those smartphones but how to trigger, stimulate and prompt parents with the right sorts of conversational techniques, working with corporates like Wilko or Johnson & Johnson to identify product ranges, ways you can bring in that sort of messaging to both families and providers through corporates and high street chains where families are already going. Also on the message: it is less around, "Your child's future depends on this educational technique" than it is around the messages that we know disadvantaged families are much more likely to respond to, about family time, sharing, fun, positivity—it is much less around giving your child the skills they need to do well at school.

Q75 Thelma Walker: Historically the managed offer from the children's centre was to have family outreach workers, many of whom had grown up within that community. The 40% cuts I mentioned earlier, mean that fewer family outreach workers are now having an impact on what we wanted to achieve.

Sir Kevan Collins: One of the conundrums is that if you take the poorest community in England, with the highest proportion of free school meals, it is in East London where I was the director of children's service and chief executive in Tower Hamlets, and there was low funding for children's centres for many years, yet their children at 11 outperform the national average for English and maths. The nuance and layering is that we are not talking about all poor communities. In fact, there are many communities that have low income that serve their children brilliantly. It is in certain pockets of communities where we find very difficult to create this alignment between what families do and provide and the way that the education promise is revealed and delivered. We know that is particularly true of some of our communities that serve what we might call the white working poor or the white working class. That is the conundrum. We have to get nuanced into why it is that in particular communities we cannot get this alignment between family values, family effort and school or early years provision. It is not a blanket poor about parenting—most children thrive pretty well in this country—it is particular communities and particular spots, like the opportunity areas, wherever it



might be, that we need to get underneath the skin of this. It is much more detailed than that, I think.

- Q76 **Ian Mearns:** I wish you had not said opportunity areas. I will let it go, I won't rake you over the coals but I still find it very interesting that the DfE does not have an opportunity area in the north-east of England, for instance.

Given what you have all been saying, can you think of or specify some particular interventions that would best support parents to improve their children's chances in the home?

Sir Kevan Collins: The reason I am hesitating is because I am struggling slightly. We do not have a really great evidence base for this. The characteristics of the interventions that seem to be the ones that have the highest promise—we said this earlier and it sounds like I am repeating myself—are certainly ones that promote the language and communication between parents and their children. It is a bit like the homework evidence: you do not have to be good at homework yourself to help your child with homework. You have to create a culture where you demonstrate the value and importance of it, as a value to a family, and that picks up in certain communities. It is the interventions that build relationships between parents and early learning settings. That is why I like children's centres so much. Parents were welcome; they were involved. Stay and play is a great way to begin the relationship between parent and child. Targeting is a problem, of course, because that in a sense stigmatises rather than being a universal thing we all do. That is something that was raised earlier. It is anything that bridges the gap without really saying to the parent, "We are trying to point at you as somehow having a deficit or failure". They are the interventions that seem to make the biggest difference.

- Q77 **Ian Mearns:** Given what you have said, and having got the evidence about what definitely works, isn't this an urgent piece of work that needs to be done?

Sir Kevan Collins: It is.

- Q78 **Ian Mearns:** There are things happening, but it seems to me that since we do not know what works, we need to be trying lots of different things all at the same time to evaluate them.

Sir Kevan Collins: The final thing I would say is that it is almost a crime when we have activity without a legacy of knowledge. There has been a large number of things funded, lots of things going on in England in early education, without any legacy of rigorous knowledge, which I think is almost criminal. We run randomised control trials and they are painful but at the end of it you do get this legacy of hard knowledge about what worked and, critically, what did not work because quite a lot of what we do, I don't think works, although other people imagine it does.

- Q79 **Ian Mearns:** I might be being pejorative—I don't use a car and I use public transport in my own constituency an awful lot—and I am afraid to



say that all too often I am on a bus and I see parents with buggies and they are more interested in their mobile phones than they are in communicating with their children. That is a real problem. We have to get people to talk to their children much more effectively and more regularly, particularly in those poorer areas.

Laura McFarlane: The Sutton Trust did a report in 2017 and it is starting to show some indicators in the right direction—more library membership, parents delivering those effective activities in the home—

Ian Mearns: I remember when we had a lot of libraries.

Laura McFarlane: Yes, absolutely. But there is starting to be some work and Cathy Nutbrown has been involved in that.

There is one more thing we are doing. It is really important that the practitioners within settings are skilled up to identify early speech and language delay and within the LEAP programme we are working in a number of settings in our local area with a speech and language therapy team. Quite shockingly, there was one setting that had never referred any of their children on to speech and language assessment. Once they had had the training, their ability to recognise and identify those children shot up. There were about 10 referrals within the first three or four weeks. We are expecting the workforce to understand a lot but they are there, seeing families every day in those settings.

We are also planning a social marketing campaign, which we hope will be on those buses, and will promote those big little moments that parents can share with their children from birth to promote early learning and relationship building. The public discourse in this country around early childhood does need to transform, in terms of the preciousness and the imperative nature of building those relationships, whether it is with a parent or a primary childcare worker. We do not talk about that enough.

Q80 Lucy Powell: How do you think we can better promote services, agencies, families, the state, and charities working together in the early years? Often we put too much emphasis on either just the parent or just the childcare setting and that is not what life is really like. How do you think we can do that better and where has that worked? Is that too vague a question?

Chair: Answer briefly, please, because we are going to finish soon.

Sir Kevan Collins: It is a great question. The issue lies in being clearer about the outcomes we want.

One of the things about the Foundation's profile, it is a huge beast and it creates a huge burden on people because we are trying to cover a lot of ground. The evidence is pointing quite clearly to a focus on self-control and self-regulation—children delaying their gratification, waiting their turn, learning to be more strategic; we heard about that earlier, with metacognition—language and literacy and building parental involvement



and engagement. We should be trying to get all these services and people working in them to understand that they are the things that we think really matter and think about how we can all focus on our attention on a narrower set of outcomes rather than the broad range that fragments what people do.

Q81 Lucy Powell: You mean some of the assessment tools.

Sir Kevan Collins: Some of the assessment tools; I am not ashamed of assessment. We are doing a piece of work with Ted soon, I hope, which is looking at finding children at the age of three who are struggling with literacy, to intervene as early as possible, doing it sensitively and carefully but focusing on a few things that really matter and very quickly identifying the children who are struggling in those areas and getting behind them. We seem to be doing too big a blanket with nobody really focused.

Lucy Powell: Ted?

Professor Melhuish: What Kevan is saying is based on our research, which shows a fairly narrow range of outcomes by the start of school that give long-term predictive validity. Therefore, we want to make sure that things such as self-regulation, language development, and so on, are well developed in children by the start of school.

There has been a move towards a greater concentration of those things in the new early learning goals, which I believe are already out, or coming out very shortly.

Of course, the whole philosophy in the early years is of the holistic perspective. Therefore, you have to cover everything in a child's development. The trouble is, when you load the early years' practitioners with covering everything, when they are rather poorly trained, it basically overloads them.

Q82 Lucy Powell: So you favour a narrower focus. Related to that, do you think that sometimes there is also a danger of not being critical enough about that in the sense that people will tick the boxes, that children can do all these things, as though they might feel that they themselves are being tested, when it would be much better to say, "No, they are struggling and need this or that intervention"? We find that Ofsted ratings of all the PVIs would say they are all great; when people fill out the Ages and Stages, they are ticking everything. They are filling out the EYFS and ticking everything. Then suddenly, oh dear, they are not school-ready at all and we have not picked that up.

Professor Melhuish: There was a question raised about apprenticeships—and I made a point earlier and I think Kevan made a similar point, about professional development—and I think two things go together. If you have on the job training—even for your graduates, because graduates are not necessarily well-trained—about what are the essential aspects of the child's environment that are going to make a



difference, things like language and self-regulation, and so on, this improves the outcomes for children and the quality of provision. We did a trial in Australia where we found that a good professional development programme improved the quality and also found that a child's attainment levels improved across that year as well. We were not expecting that because we thought there were only a few months before the end of the training and this year's assessment, that there would not be enough time for the training to have had an effect, but lo and behold, it did have an effect. I would anticipate that the children who get those trained teachers in the subsequent year, when they have a full year of experience with those trained teachers, would show an even bigger improvement. I would give a very high priority to improving high-level professional development, not doing what we have done in the past, chucking it open to agencies, where the money goes out there and you have your £5,000 to spend on professional development and it does not matter where it goes as long as you spend it in a year. We want to have professional development programmes that we know work. We have done randomised control trials on professional development programmes and there are others out there. If you do it right, it really does work.

Steve McIntosh: A brief comment on your point about co-ordinating with local areas. As well as the example of Lambeth, Save the Children is also doing work in a variety of local areas around children's communities on what a blueprint for when agencies need to work effectively together—nursery schools, children's centres, health workers, and others—looks like. We are very happy to send you a note on what that looks like. We have particularly identified great school leaders, for example, who can play a leadership role.

Lastly, because I know you are coming to the close, on a little point from earlier around what the overall resources in the childcare system look like, on whether we are investing sufficiently in disadvantaged communities and how we are spreading resources across the income spectrum. Save the Children is publishing a big report over the summer about whether we have that balance right and whether we should look at some rebalancing to assure quality and access to employment support, and ensure that the benefits of early education can be better reinvested for the poorest families.

Q83 **Chair:** If you could give us a preview of the report—

Steve McIntosh: Certainly.

Chair: Basically what you are saying, which is similar to what has been said, is that we are spending money in a topsy-turvy way.

Steve McIntosh: We certainly will give you a preview of the report.

Chair: Is that what your report, roughly will say?

Steve McIntosh: Yes.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. It has been really helpful to our inquiry.

Thank you for the work and the research that you do. It is most important.