

## Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Further Education White Paper](#), HC 756

Tuesday 8 September 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 8 September 2020.

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Tom Hunt; Dr Caroline Johnson; Kim Johnson; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds; Christian Wakeford.

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### Witnesses

**I:** David Hughes, Chief Executive, Association of Colleges; Bill Watkin, Chief Executive, Sixth Form Colleges Association; Jane Hickie, Managing Director, Association of Employment and Learning Providers; Kirstie Donnelly MBE, Chief Executive, City and Guilds Group; Stephen Evans, Chief Executive, Learning and Work Institute; and David Robinson, Director of Post-16 and Skills, Education Policy Institute.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: David Hughes, Bill Watkin, Jane Hickie, Kirstie Donnelly MBE, David Robinson and Stephen Evans.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for coming today. This is going to be an informal roundtable, so not a questioning session in the way that we usually do it. I will bring up some topics, other members will come in and ask questions in the middle of it. There are quite a lot of you, so please be as concise as possible as we have broadcasting restrictions on time. I will go round and ask you to introduce yourselves and give the name of your organisation for the benefit of the tape.

**David Hughes:** Hello, Rob. Hi, everyone. It is David Hughes. I am the Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges. It is great to be here.

**Bill Watkin:** Good morning. Bill Watkin, Chief Executive of the Sixth Form Colleges Association.

**Jane Hickie:** Jane Hickie, Managing Director of AELP. It is good to be here.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** Kirstie Donnelly, CEO of City and Guilds Group.

**David Robinson:** David Robinson, Director of Post-16 and Skills at the Education Policy Institute.

**Stephen Evans:** Good morning. I am Stephen Evans. I am the Chief Executive of the Learning and Work Institute.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. I am going to set out some of the topics that we would like to discuss today. One is obviously the key challenges of the White Paper. One of the options being considered is bringing further education colleges back into the public sector. We would like to know what your views are on improving higher technical education and the Government's July 2020 response to the consultation on that.

Something I am particularly interested in—and I know other members are—is the commitment to have a German-style FE system. We would like to know what that means. Is it desirable, and is it possible? We would like to know what you think about the sweeping overhaul of qualifications, how you feel the delivery of T-levels has gone so far. Is the timetable going to be met? Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State, acknowledged that further education had been starved of investment for decades. What levels of investment do you think are needed? You will be aware of our Select Committee report last year. Should there be a dedicated funding pot, like a continuation of the pupil premium?

What are your impressions of the recommendations from the Dame Mary Ney review? How do you think the Government's opportunity guarantee will fit into plans for the White Paper, and are there any other proposals



that you would like to add?

**David Hughes:** Thanks, Rob. That is really great. There are lots of priorities for the White Paper. One of the things we have all been asking for, for a very long time—and both the Augar review and the Dame Mary Ney review back this up—is a national strategy, clear national priorities, a real understanding of the purpose and mission of schools, colleges and universities alongside ITPs, so that we can be clear about where everybody is directing their energy.

The Dame Mary Ney report was fantastic when it talked about the nurturing relationship that the Government should have with colleges as strategic players, making sure that we move beyond competition between different organisations all the time and a much more collaborative environment around that shared set of purposes and priorities.

We have had a 50% cut in adult funding over the last decade. The adult funding future looks terrible. The funding rate is completely inadequate for young people, but for adults the amount of funding overall is completely inadequate, as well as the rate being inadequate, so there is a lot to come out of there.

I go back to Augar though. Augar talked about the half of the population that miss out on investment in their own development because they do not go on to higher education. This White Paper needs to set out how the system will deliver to that group and make sure universities, higher education and colleges are successful but, also, a much more systemic approach to supporting adults throughout their lives so that they can carry on learning, get retraining, be successful in work and help improve productivity.

I could go on forever but the final one is: how do colleges engage in a long-term relationship with employers and how do we get colleges funded to provide the advice and support to employers so they can improve their productivity? Those seem to be really key issues.

**David Robinson:** To follow up on some of the funding points, we know that funding for 16 to 19-year-olds has been cut since 2010 at twice the rate observed in schools. When we look at funding for vocational education in upper secondary and compared to other European countries, our funding rates are around 20% lower than the average across Europe and around 40% lower than countries such as Germany. There is quite a significant difference between us and some of those so-called high performing countries in the benchmarks that we might be looking to.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** I agree with a lot of what David has just said. We absolutely have to now seize this opportunity to address the lifelong learning system that we do not have. This has to be a plan not about qualifications, which you might be surprised to hear me say, but about a national plan for skills and jobs.



We have been running a number of regional roadshows on the back of the recovery and resilience report that you were involved with, Chair, and it has been fascinating. We have done four of these regional events so far with employers as well as the delivery system.

If we are truly going to look at a levelling-up agenda and we are going to look at how we address what is now going to be a systemic issue of how we move people from one industry to a new industry because of the job crisis we face, we have to think very differently about that sort of local personal devolvement of funding and planning, while still not losing sight of needing to have a national standard and an umbrella that pulls all of that together.

My last point, before we get into it later, is why the German system? Have we really asked ourselves why we need to go and copy or borrow the German system? Have we looked enough at the system we already have? Our system is envied by lots of countries all over the world. Are we going to look at other systems, like Singapore or even South Korea, before we jump to Germany? In fact, there was a report done back in 2013 that I would recommend everybody read, if you haven't done so already. That talks very openly about why a dual system might not work or might not be as good as we think it is, certainly for the country and culture that we have today.

Q3 **Chair:** Just to understand, why not a German system?

**Kirstie Donnelly:** The first thing is we are jumping to the conclusion that a German system will be right culturally for what we have in the country today. We are ignoring the fact that we have quite a successful technical and vocational system. As you know, we work internationally and a lot of countries look to the English TVET system as being one that provides flexibility, the opportunity to look at less of a binary choice between technical and academic. Where can you start to fuse the stepping-off points and the progression points between the skills system that we are going to need, which is going to have to be far more flexible?

If what we want from the German system is the enviable aspect of how Germany has knitted together the social aspect and the employer aspect, which is probably what we most look to in the German system—how well they have that demand modelling—that is something we can still achieve without literally picking up the German system and thinking that we can read it across over here into the UK.

Q4 **Christian Wakeford:** Kirstie, I joined the Greater Manchester roadshow yesterday, although unfortunately I had to leave before it broke out into the conversation. Sticking to brevity being key, as the Chair said, I wonder what the overall message has been from those roadshows so far. I completely agree that it is the outcome we need to be measuring not necessarily the qualification, especially when so many industries are essentially collapsing. How do we reskill and retrain those individuals into an entirely new market or sector, especially the emerging digital sector



for places like Greater Manchester?

**Kirstie Donnelly:** For too long, funding has driven the behaviour of what gets delivered. That is not necessarily a criticism of those of us delivering. It is just the reality of the situation.

Q5 **Chair:** Bill, what should be in the White Paper, particularly for sixth form?

**Bill Watkin:** One of the challenges, as was clear from your introduction this morning, is the sheer scope and scale of what we mean by further education at the moment. Our understanding from early conversations is that the most likely focus of the White Paper is going to be on 18-plus and on vocational and technical education, and that is not really our world. Sixth form colleges straddle two sectors—schools and further education—usually quite comfortably, and sometimes a bit uncomfortably. Sixth form colleges deliver a schools' curriculum. They employ school teachers and they deal exclusively with 16 to 18-year-olds. Most 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education go to a school sixth form or a sixth form college.

One of the challenges about this White Paper is deciding what will be the scope and the focus. Whatever the focus is, it has to do some of those things that David and others have talked about already: proper funding levels, as recommended by this Committee earlier in the year, the applied general qualifications, BTEC and other similar qualifications to provide a range of opportunities for young people. We have to make sure that we are ready for population growth.

There are going to be about an extra 260,000 16 to 18-year-olds in education in the next few years, and we have to understand if we have the capacity to accommodate them all in the places they go and where the economy needs them to go. We also need to consider how to set up a new provision for 16 to 18-year-olds. At the moment we need to be more co-ordinated at a local level. We need to review what is needed to ensure that we get the best value for money and make the best use of existing expertise when setting up new provision.

Q6 **Chair:** Before I bring in Tom, can I get Jane and Stephen to make some early comments, please?

**Jane Hickie:** I suppose an opening from me would be along the lines of how are we defining FE? From what we hear at AELP, it tends to be about colleges and students in a full-time classroom environment, or are we talking about the whole lot? It feels like there is a bit of a danger that these reform discussions are going to be around colleges, whereas at AELP, while our members do that kind of full-time education, we also do traineeships and apprenticeships. We are keen that that is reflected in whatever the paper produces.

The second thing is the distinction between full-time education and work-based learning, short courses and part-time courses, otherwise the policy becomes a little confused. Going back to David Hughes's original point,



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funding for 16 to 18-year-olds is not sufficient but it is pretty grim for adults as well, so we would like to see that addressed. A long-term sustainable funding model for apprenticeships would be top of our list, and very much better support for level 2. Finally, I would echo what Kirstie said: why a German system? I am not sure why we are looking at that.

**Q7 Tom Hunt:** Kirstie made some comments about us currently having a technical education system that works very well. Often that isn't what I hear from employers in my constituency who think we need quite a significant change to the technical education provision in this country. With regards to a German system, I understand that cultures are different. I have heard the German system mentioned a million times over in the past few years. It is one of these things that people just go to and think of without really thinking it through. I understand it is a bit simplistic to think it will be as simple as becoming more German when it comes to FE. I note the point about the culture being different here than in Germany. To a point, though, maybe we need to culturally change slightly when it comes to FE. There still seems to me to be a little bit of bias towards the academic route, and perhaps we need to culturally change a bit and be open to that.

**Chair:** Could I get Stephen to answer that first? He hasn't spoken yet.

**Stephen Evans:** Thank you. I would like to see a higher ambition overall for learning and skills in the White Paper and beyond. Our research suggests that we have gone backwards over the last decade and we risk falling further down the international league table. A higher ambition has to be backed up by investment in funding rates and overall.

More importantly beyond that—and getting to the questions asked about the technical and vocational systems—we need a system and a joined-up strategy and approach that sees all these things together, so that we see the sum of the parts rather than the individual parts. Part of where vocational and technical education plays out is with employers and the labour market in how all that operates. The education system does not sit on its own. It sits with our approach to growth. It sits with our approach to productivity, our approach to levelling up and all those other things. I would like to see the White Paper setting out a vision for how investment in further education and adult learning can help us achieve lots of those objectives together as an overall strategy, rather than lots of individual parts that do not always join up.

Lastly, we know that we have loads of big inequalities between different parts of the country and different groups that too often miss out on the chance to get into learning and education, so I would like to see a laser-like focus on levelling up opportunity for different groups and areas of the country as well.

**Q8 Chair:** It would be quite useful for people watching to understand what the German system actually is, and I don't know if one of you would like



to define that.

**David Robinson:** I have already talked about the funding levels being higher in Germany, and for vocational education it tends to be much less classroom based, with many more apprenticeships. They tend to have longer programmes of study, typically over three years rather than the two-year standard that we see here. There are many less low-level qualifications, more qualified to A-level or equivalent level, and a broader curriculum, so less vocationally specific. They tend to continue studying general subjects, social sciences and languages alongside a specialism. The teaching workforce in Germany is quite different as well. There is a requirement for university degrees there. In general, it tends to be longer, higher funded, broader curriculum with more of a focus on bringing up the tail of underperformance. I am sure there is more to add from others.

**David Hughes:** That is a good summary. I would add that it is much more of a social partnership, isn't it? That is the bit of the German system I would love to see the White Paper enshrine, so much more of a partnership between employers and the state. Stephen's point about investment is not just that Government investment is low but that employer investment in skills and training is lower in the UK, and we need to address that. I am not blaming employers. We need the system to drive the sorts of things employers find useful, so much more higher technical skills, much more job focus, much more flexible and probably much less big, fat qualifications that last a long time and much more of an agile system. So a partnership approach that attracts more Government and employer investment, much more focused on driving and stimulating demand. We have lots of employers who do not use training because they do not believe it will work for them. What we have to do is say, "Let's have a system that makes them absolutely want the training for their staff because they know that their bottom line will improve." That partnership is really something—

**Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. A couple of you have mentioned the levelling-up agenda. The FE college in my constituency has 3,000 students but two thirds of them enter the college without English and maths, so I think there is a major issue about the lack of understanding of the socioeconomic group who come to FE, particularly those that require additional support. We have heard that more young people are now experiencing mental health issues. We have talked about funding, so what do you think the Government now need to do to ensure the FE sector is funded adequately to support our young people?

**David Hughes:** It is a fantastic question. Most of the young people who do not get good English and maths at GCSE end up in colleges, so you do have a concentration. The pupil premium stops at 16—there is no real rationale for that—and we think the funding rate needs to be around £5,000. It has been just over £4,000 for 10 years. David Robinson has already said it is 10 years of neglect, so we are not investing the most money in the young people who need it most at that critical phase of



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their lives. They need the enrichment, the extra tuition and the support. Even the catch-up funding that we have next year is probably half of what we think we need, and we think it is needed for at least two years to catch up.

Q9 **Chair:** Realistically, recognising all the pressures on Government money, how much money are you asking per head for FE at the moment?

**David Hughes:** We think it needs to be at least £4,750 to £5,000.

Q10 **Chair:** It is £4,200 at the moment, isn't it?

**David Hughes:** Yes. It went up by 7% this academic year, which was a great start but that was about a quarter of what was needed to get it to the right rate. The pupil premium on top of that, post-16, would be a massive boost to support the English and maths that we absolutely think is needed for young people—

Q11 **Chair:** How much are you asking for for that?

**David Hughes:** We think the pupil premium could be around £700 or £800 on top per student.

Q12 **Chair:** You are asking for basically another £500 per head, plus another £800 on top of that?

**David Hughes:** Yes.

Q13 **Ian Mearns:** It would take a quantum leap for us to emulate the German system because of the different relationship between employers and trainers that exists in the German system. The German chambers of commerce expect their members to train their workforces, and you have to be a member of the chamber of commerce if you are a business. In this country that relationship just does not exist, and the vast majority of SMEs and small businesses have very little to do with workplace training, sadly. Therefore, it would need a complete mind shift from business but also probably a regulatory input from Government to make sure that employers fulfil their duty to employ and train their own workforce, as currently exists in the German system. For us to be talking about a German system would take a major shift of economic, political and commercial thinking in this country.

**Chair:** I remember going with Ian to Germany on a Committee visit and asking an employer why they gave 14-year-olds work experience from school, and they said, "What do you mean? It is our duty." There were no incentives. They just said, "It is our duty to do it."

**David Robinson:** Yes, the level of regulation in the German labour market is much higher. Around a third of jobs are licensed in the labour market in Germany, and the figure in England is around 19%, so that is one of the key differences between education and employment there.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** Having put myself in the front to start the conversation about the German system and why not copy it, I was trying





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to make the point that has already been made, which is that it is not the panacea for everything. Going back to what Tom said, we still need to fix some of the problems in our TVET system and we need to address the issues that David has already so elegantly put forward.

A report by a German professor, Dr Dieter Euler, looked at why it wasn't working when they tried to transfer it into other countries, and that is all I am suggesting. The last thing we want to do as we look to a post-Covid recovery is get ourselves so fixated on that being the panacea answer, and then we miss the very thing we need to be doing right here, right now, at this moment.

Going back to what I would like to see in the White Paper, and what I think it needs to address, it is not just about young people, as important as they are. The FE system has to serve adult lifelong learning, as does the whole adult provider agenda. We have to do something about a lifelong learning entitlement. We have to do something about having a lifelong learning entitlement that links to some kind of skills credit, which then allows an individual to invest as they progress, as they earn more money, as they level up and come through social mobility. Then we start to get the tripartite relationship of funding between what the state puts in, what the employer puts in and what the individual puts in. We must try to seize this opportunity for an FE White Paper to be the overview look at what a lifelong learning system needs to address.

**Chair:** I want to come on to lifelong learning in a bit.

**Bill Watkin:** It is impossible and wrong to argue against what Kirstie has just said. It is clearly hugely important, but the way the conversation has gone in the last 10 to 15 minutes shows how broad the FE sector is and I would say again that it includes all those 16 to 18-year-olds doing A-levels and Applied Generals. There are other considerations on the skills agenda that apply from a more academic perspective. The industrial strategy, for example, cannot be delivered through technical and vocational education alone. We are going to need the next generation of doctors, scientists, lawyers and teachers, and so on. Those higher skills are also important.

One of the ways in which a more academic student is getting access to skills is through the Applied General qualifications, the BTEC and the CTEC. I hope the review will look at the range of qualifications that are available to 16 to 18-year-olds and will say that it is important, not just for social mobility but for the skills of the next generation of professionals, to make sure that Applied Generals continue to exist.

Q14 **Tom Hunt:** I could not agree more, as David was saying, about seeing it more as an ecosystem and not seeing FE siloed away. It seems that has so often been the case. I look at the local area I represent, and having a conversation between the young adults and, right from an early age, the school teachers, the employers, the local council and the enterprise partnership about getting to that ecosystem approach. A little bit more



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about how we can get there would be very useful, and also about the relationship between FE and HE and how this fits into the idea of perhaps a more technical focus for some universities and more degree apprenticeships as well.

**Jane Hickie:** I echo what Stephen said about the opportunity here for something that can be quite visionary but that also addresses the areas of disadvantage. A lot of the feedback we are getting is that people are not accessing systems. We need to address that.

Going back to the German system again, it is dependent on that social contract. I am not sure we have that infrastructure so that we can make the shift as quickly as we might need. One of the key concerns I would have is that, as I understand it, the system requires a student to decide whether they are taking a vocational route or an academic route at the age of 11, which seems to box somebody in quite early on in their education.

Q15 **David Simmonds:** Touching on a number of points people have made about the system itself, I think one of the things that attracts politicians to the German system is not so much the system itself but the perception that the outcomes are regarded by both young people and employers as being much more positive than those that we hear described in the UK.

The question that then leads to, particularly the debate for the Government, is whether colleges should be brought entirely into the public sector or whether they should be autonomous institutions. How does the Government ensure that the system of colleges that we have in the UK is delivering the outcomes we want strategically? Is that through a commissioning process? Is that through letting the market decide what it provides? Is it by making employers dictate to colleges what they should be doing locally, or is it through some other structure? How should the system better serve those longer-term needs of the country?

**David Robinson:** We often talk about the German system as being one of high status in Germany. In fact, they share a similar characteristic whereby most UK adults have a positive view of the vocation system but very few of them would recommend it to someone they know. Germany is also quite unique in that aspect. You can almost see this as being a system that they and we often see for other people's children. It is not necessarily true that within Germany it is held in high regard when considering it as a route for people's own children.

**David Hughes:** Perhaps to try to link David and Tom's questions, what we need is a national strategy that sets priorities. We have nothing. A college or a training provider can deliver any qualification that is eligible, and it is all equally valid and there are no priorities. That is nonsense, particularly when we know we have pressing needs in specific sectors. Health and social care, for instance, is an obvious one now. Construction and infrastructure will become more important, cyber-security, digital—the list goes on. What we need is a national set of priorities around that.



Then we need place-based planning, not in numbers of places but in capacity to deliver and to allow individuals and employers much greater clarity about where they go to get what they want.

What I hear from employers all the time, particularly SMEs, is that they get flooded with all sorts of competitive offers from colleges, training providers and universities saying, “We can answer all your needs,” and they do not know who to trust. We need much more place-based agreement about who specialises, who can provide the advice, and who can tell people, both employers and individuals, to signpost them to the right provision. Then we need the Government to invest in the specialist provision that is needed, the technical people who know and understand those sectors, who understand skills and business development, and the facilities that are cutting edge, so when employers see those facilities and talk to those people it is really credible, they trust it and they get what they want. Finally, we need a long-term relationship between employers and providers, including colleges.

**Chair:** Thank you. Timewise, can we all try to be concise? That includes us as well.

**Q16 Dr Caroline Johnson:** My question relates to the list of apparent advantages of the German system. There are two I want to ask about in particular. One that was brought up is that the teaching workforce all have a university degree. I am interested to know, when the skills that are being taught are predominantly vocationally based, why that would be thought to be an advantage. Does that not push more individuals down an academic route, rather than less?

The second one is employer investment. One of the things that particularly employers in small businesses say is that they spend a lot of money on training people only for them to leave for the higher wages offered by larger companies. How do the Germans prevent that from happening?

**Kirstie Donnelly:** On professionalisation—I think this came out in the Dame Mary Ney review, too—there is no doubt we need to do more to professionalise the sector across vocational. I absolutely agree with you, Caroline. I do not think that means that everybody has to have a degree in order to teach. If anything, what we should be looking to in creating a social partnership is encouraging more of industry to come into colleges and providers to provide some of that real, on-the-ground tuition and tutoring. How can we look at initiatives to enable that to happen?

It is fascinating that we have got this far in the conversation and we have not yet really talked about digital, yet we all know it is the one big, burning platform that when you talk to every single employer, the colleges and providers, everybody is saying that we need more and more digital skills to be delivered and taught for both productivity and for the future. In the FE White Paper, I think we have to look at how we



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professionalise the workforce within FE to be able to deliver and support a much more blended online delivery model.

I also think we need the colleges, and providers for that matter, to rethink this notion of, “We don’t have to do everything in a brick institution.” Going back to David Simmonds’s earlier question, I think the partnership of delivery can even be something that is done on the ground between employers, colleges and providers. We can even rethink the costs and capital investment that we are making in lots of capital infrastructure, when there are now different modes of delivery that we should be trying to take forward through the White Paper, which would have a huge impact on costs and investment. It would also mean that we need to look at different skills to address the professionalisation of the sector.

**Stephen Evans:** I was going to mention digital, which Kirstie has just mentioned. We have not mentioned coronavirus yet, which has changed the whole context and accelerated some of that push towards digital and online learning. That feels to me like a big changed context for the FE White Paper and how we are going to harness some of that.

Also, the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits has doubled in the last five months, so how can investment in adult learning and further education help to tackle unemployment and get people back to work? We still have 4 million people on furlough, so how can we encourage them into learning? That might help them if they are going back to their current job or if their job is not going to return and they are going to need to find a new job.

Lastly, linked to that on the English and maths point, we talked about young people but there are 9 million adults across England who have low literacy or numeracy and probably slightly more who have low digital skills, to go back to that. Participation in adult literacy and numeracy classes has fallen by 40% in the last five years, so for me it feels like we need a big push on that as a building block to get the higher-level skills that we have been talking about.

Q17 **Chair:** Stephen, could you send us some statistics on those levels of literacy, the 9 million? That has been challenged sometimes, and I would be very interested to see that because I have quoted it before and then been argued against about it.

When the Secretary of State did his speech on further education and talked about the university cap, had you all, as the leading lights of FE, been consulted in advance about that speech?

**David Hughes:** I am not saying we are special, but we have been talking about those issues with the Secretary of State for a while, and now the Commission on the College of the Future has been engaging with him and his officials on those sorts of issues and trying to move into very different relationships between the Government and colleges.



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One of the difficulties of these discussions, and it has kind of emerged a bit, is that I think the White Paper will be a lot about colleges because colleges are public ethos institutions. They are anchor institutions and are a vital part of the education infrastructure. Sorry, Jane, but independent training providers have a different status. They are very important, but they have a different status within the system. What we have to try to do is get real clarity on the role that colleges have, with others, including—

**Q18 Chair:** To be clear, because I wasn't clear if you answered it, should FE colleges be brought back into the public sector?

**David Hughes:** I think it is irrelevant. It is an ONS designation. What I am interested in is getting the nurturing relationship that Dame Mary Ney talks about, getting the funding right. If, in the end, that results in public sector designation, we have to make sure that the freedoms and flexibilities are still there because—

**Jane Hickie:** On the point about ITPs being different, the AELP position is that any provider should be able to offer anything. Therefore, there should be a level playing field. It should be the best provider for the job, and this paper needs to reflect that. We should not be talking about funding institutions. We should be talking about funding individuals, which is why AELP has always held the position about individual learning accounts, skills accounts, so the funding should follow the learner.

**Chair:** I see David nodding in disagreement.

**David Hughes:** In the end, if we want high-level technical education in engineering, advanced manufacturing and carbon net zero, we need institutions that focus that provision. Colleges are there. They do that kind of stuff and they are right. There is a place for independent training providers. I am not saying this is exclusive, but we need colleges to work and thrive. The vast majority of young people are—

**Chair:** Okay, got it.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** Without wanting to sound like I am just putting forward a compromise position, I think what we are saying here—and the word was used earlier—is that we need a different ecosystem to address what is needed. It will need a lifelong learning entitlement in the way that Jane has articulated. It will still need institutions. I think, though, back to David Simmonds's question earlier, it needs to be far more employer-led rather than Government-owned because, at the end of the day, we have 9.6 million people on furlough, of which only 25% have gone back into work so far. We have a different context, whether we like it or not. The FE White Paper was probably going to happen before Covid regardless. It is needed, change is needed, no one is denying that, but the whole Covid context has now provided a very different angle. What we now need is a national plan—I agree with David on that entirely—for skills and jobs, but it needs both. It needs a blend of provision.

**Q19 Chair:** Very quickly, there has been a lot of talk about attainment levels



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in schools widening and stalling between disadvantaged and better-off students. What is the situation in FE colleges?

**David Robinson:** We are in the middle of doing some research on this at the moment. Our emerging findings are that disadvantage continues to affect young people in the 16 to 19 space. That is they continue to fall further behind when—

Q20 **Chair:** The EPI and Teach First have said that the attainment gap had been stalling or getting worse over the last three years. Is that the case with FE?

**David Robinson:** Again, this is emerging research. We are not quite in a position to say yet. It is slightly complicated by the fact that there is no standard curriculum at 16 to 19, so it makes it more difficult to measure. The fact that fewer young people have been taking AS-levels means that the trend looks like the gap is narrowing because it has been more advantaged young people who have been taking fewer qualifications than they were before. Sorry, that is a bit convoluted but—

Q21 **Chair:** Thank you. Stephen, have you done any work on that?

**Stephen Evans:** We are doing a bit of work at the moment to try to look at the position for adults. We know that before the crisis we had a widening participation gap in learning in general, on a broad definition of learning. We do not quite know what has happened since the crisis, but that is something we are trying to look at at the moment.

Q22 **Chair:** David, can I ask you again about the public ownership issue? It is very unusual for you, but I don't feel that you gave me a straight answer on it. I just want to know, yes or no, should FE colleges be brought back into the public sector?

**David Hughes:** I do not think it is a straight yes or no answer, sorry. I am going to be a politician on this. I think what we need is the right relationship. We need the freedoms and flexibilities. We need to get them as strategic players.

Q23 **Chair:** That does not mean anything. It is a big thing. It is being talked about: should they be brought back in? The head of the AOC should be able to give a view on it, surely.

**David Hughes:** The ONS will decide whether they are public or private. The relationship is what we want to focus on, and then the ONS makes that decision based on—

Q24 **Chair:** But you will have a view. Should they be brought back into public ownership or not?

**David Hughes:** I am agnostic, I am sorry. I think that is an end of the White Paper decision by the ONS, not a front decision. It might be that they become public sector. They are public ethos institutions and—

Q25 **Chair:** I do not accept that it just does not make any difference, because



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there will be issues of autonomy, control, funding, their business model and all kinds of things.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** My stance on this is that, if anything, they have to be more owned by the employer. The employer has to have more say in how colleges deliver and what is needed, and therefore putting them into public ownership will make that incredibly—

Q26 **Chair:** You sound like you are going for the German model.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** Well, no, because I do not think it means that is the German model—I am not against the social intervention of the German model. I am saying you just cannot pick it up and put it in this country in the same way.

Q27 **Chair:** David, I have to say I don't think you should duck this. I am sorry, but I think the head of the AOC must have a view on it either way. You cannot be agnostic on something as fundamental as whether or not all colleges should be brought back into the public sector.

**David Hughes:** I will do another political answer. In Scotland and Northern Ireland they are public sector, and they are thriving and doing well. There is nothing to fear about it. The thing is about the right investment and the right relationship. That might mean that they get designated public sector. I think that is fine, but what we must not lose is their ability to be fleet of foot. To gain investment from employers, as Kirstie says, is really critical.

Q28 **Chair:** Okay. Bill, I am going to bring you in.

**Bill Watkin:** Our experience in the sixth form college sector is that it is good to give colleges a choice about whether to join the public sector or not, because local context can be important in the decision. Twenty-six sixth form colleges have adopted academy status and, in doing so, have joined the public sector. I hope the White Paper will review the position of Catholic colleges that are still looking to academise but, for well-rehearsed reasons, are not able to do so yet.

**Chair:** Thank you, Bill. We are going to move on to T-levels, as they are now called.

Q29 **Apsana Begum:** Thanks to the panel for joining us this morning. How do you feel the delivery of T-levels has gone so far, and how could T-levels fit into the Government's possible reforms?

**Kirstie Donnelly:** We are actively involved already in getting ready to deliver the T-levels. It is a really apposite question. It is very early days. What we have now is a great opportunity with T-levels, for the first time in a long time, to measure some longitudinal impact. It is going to take three, five, even 10 years, and one of the problems with successive Governments is that we tend to want the results straightaway. We have to stick with the T-level agenda because they are a great opportunity to



address the imbalance that we have had between A-levels and technical options.

We probably now need to take a look at T-levels in the light of Covid, as we have just been talking about, and ensure that we are making them modern and relevant for the workforce of today and tomorrow and, therefore, getting even greater planning from employers into what T-levels need to look like. That has been one of the successes so far of T-levels. They have had a lot of employer involvement. Even where employers are doubtful of their future success, they are at least actively involved in talking about how they will shape them and how they will deliver the work experience.

It is the work experience that is probably still the biggest barrier to how we will address a successful T-level programme. Again, with Covid, I think we can remain optimistic that there are now new digital ways that we can get our heads around delivering an experience that is akin to work experience for some sectors by doing it more digitally. I think we now have to stick with T-levels.

**David Hughes:** I think Kirstie is absolutely right that it is too early to say. The colleges that are delivering them this autumn have good demand from young people, and they have employers wanting to do the work placements, so it is a good start but it is very low numbers. The really important bit—again, as Kirstie said—is about sticking at it, making it work and adapting it over time. It is very easy just to kick them and say they are wrong or to criticise. Everyone needs to get behind them because we need really good, high-status technical education for young people. The sense of a broad programme that helps young people develop a broad range of skills for their whole career and life is really important and is enshrined in the T-level.

Q30 **Kim Johnson:** There appears to be a hierarchy of 16 to 18 education, with schools receiving higher levels of funding than FE colleges. Before recess our Committee heard witness testimony from a group of young people undertaking degree apprenticeships. They informed us that they did not receive any effective advice and guidance about these courses. What do you think needs to happen to ensure that more young people are made aware of technical and vocational opportunities and are not just directed towards A-levels?

**Jane Hickie:** I am going to go to the Baker clause. I have talked about this a few times now, but the enforcement of the Baker clause in schools is essential, particularly with the A-level situation this year. We had students coming out of school—and I have talked about my own daughter talking with friends—who have never heard of an apprenticeship. That is outrageous, so there ought to be some kind of enforcement of the Baker clause. If that information is not being shared in schools, I think it should be reflected in the Ofsted report.

Q31 **Chair:** You want tougher Ofsted measures on this. What other





enforcement measures would you have?

**Jane Hickie:** The sharing of information. I spoke to somebody recently who was talking about a school that he visited where all along the corridors you had posters about apprenticeships and you were signposted to where you could get advice. We need all of that kind of visibility so that people know what their options are. If it is built into the inspection system, I think we will see an improvement.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** I agree with everything that Jane said. It goes back a little bit to the German conversation, which is that we need to get a better system of employers working much more directly with schools and colleges to do that promotion. We know that careers advice and guidance is underfunded. We know it has been an historical problem, and it is actually the root cause for a lot of the issues we still have.

One of the things I very much hope from the White Paper is that we see some very defined policy and funding conversations around what is now going to go into making a successful careers advice system, not just for young people but also for adults.

**Bill Watkin:** In a competitive environment, particularly when the funding levels are low, there are lots of strategies that are being used, of course, to consciously prevent students from getting the information or the views that they should have. Having had a schools background, I am aware of situations where students at 16 have been told that they do not need to apply to join the school sixth form. They have to apply to leave the school at 16, which is, of course, not something that you can enforce. I am aware of schools that have not invited college principals or representatives to come into the school or, if they have, they have put four or five of them on the stage at the same time and given them two or three minutes each to put the case forward for the college.

We are in a very competitive environment, and one of the reasons why schools do this is because a lot of them are struggling to survive with very small numbers in their sixth form provision.

Q32 **Ian Mearns:** It would be remiss of me not to mention careers information, advice and guidance. That is what we have been talking about. It is quite clear that the current strategy, which has been employed basically since the Connexions service was all but abolished—there was never a golden age of careers advice and guidance but, for goodness' sake, it was a lot better than it is currently. Careers information, advice and guidance should be just built in. It has to be impartial and independent of the setting it is in. The trouble is, the way in which most of it is imparted these days is all about bums-on-seats funding regimes, post-16.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** I do not know why we would not look to a careers advice entitlement in the same way we talk about entitlement for people to do learning. It is an entitlement that can be proportionate to the



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learning and to the transition stage they might be at, whether it is a young person or an adult. We are talking about borrowing things from different countries. It is sort of what operates in the American system and, in fact, so much so—

Q33 **Chair:** Could you explain to people who do not know what that is in a nutshell?

**Kirstie Donnelly:** In a nutshell, a proportion of the funding would be available as an entitlement to the different transitions as people go through their lifelong learning journey. It might be different for someone transitioning from school to college, from college to an apprenticeship or into HE, and then even within a lifelong learning entitlement a proportion of it would be available for people to go and get good quality advice and guidance.

Q34 **Chair:** That sounds like a very good idea. Perhaps we could look at that in more detail if you want to send something through.

David, are we on track with the timing of T-levels?

**David Hughes:** Yes, I think we are on track. I was talking to the Department about it yesterday. The numbers this autumn were always planned to be quite low. I think that makes sense. When you implement something big and new, you want to test it out, move forward slowly and not try to deliver the whole elephant in one go. We are on track. The Covid pandemic makes the work placements harder, and in some sectors we are going to struggle with T-levels because of the impact on the economy, but this is a long-term reform that we need to get behind.

Q35 **Chair:** You think they are on track, in a nutshell?

**David Hughes:** Yes.

Q36 **Chair:** The thing that worries me is the work placements, because when I speak to colleges they say that they are finding it hard to get the employers to do these work placements. How is that going, and what incentive is there for employers? For how many months are they supposed to offer the work placements?

**David Hughes:** It is about three months.

Q37 **Chair:** Do the employers get a financial incentive to do this?

**David Hughes:** No. One of the things we are talking about with the Department is whether we could do some or all of that virtually. Everyone is working from home, so a virtual work placement should be workable for students.

Q38 **Chair:** Could some of the money for traineeships, and so on, possibly be transferred to incentivise companies to do this?

**Kirstie Donnelly:** I think so. We have even talked in the past, without confusing apprenticeships, about even more flexibility within the



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apprenticeship levy pot to provide more work experience, and there is no reason why within traineeships it could not be used for that reason. In fact, we know from the Chancellor's recent announcements that they are making some money available to help fund something akin to work experience, but it is how we transfer that over into the T-level regime, too. It is going to need some investment to make it really work.

**Stephen Evans:** We have been doing some work around the industry placement offer and employers. Lots of the employers we have spoken to said that they want to help but that they are a bit confused about what good looks like, and there has been lots of guidance around that. Also, there are myriad things that they are asked to do, whether it is T-levels, work placements, apprenticeships, traineeships, Kickstart now, and all the rest of it, and they were crying out for a bit of, "Well, what do you actually want us to do?" or "What is the best in this situation?" or "What would work for me?" We are involved in the employer support offer, but I think a bit more around that would help with the numbers as well.

Q39 **Chair:** Do the three of you think a financial incentive would help?

**David Hughes:** Yes.

**David Robinson:** Yes, I would imagine so.

Q40 **Kim Johnson:** I want to ask the panel for their opinion on 14-year-olds being able to access vocational training opportunities in colleges. I am aware that my FE provides those opportunities, particularly for 14-year-olds and young people who have SEND.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** In a nutshell, I completely agree with you, Kim. We need to go back to having more of that provision. I do not want to take us back to the dreaded old diploma conversations and why they did or did not work, but one of the really good things about the diploma model was the opportunity to start to look at that transition and provide more opportunity for young people to get some experience and have that choice element coming in as early as 14. Some would say you could even go back sooner. I wonder whether now, as we think about bouncing forward post-Covid recovery, this is an opportunity to rethink those transition stages and have more opportunity for vocational to come in virtually and in the classroom much earlier on at 14.

**David Hughes:** A small number of colleges do really fantastic 14 to 16 provision. It motivates young people, and it needs to be funded properly. It is that echo system thing that Tom was talking about: how do you work with schools to take young people who need that vocational bit to motivate them to get their English and maths to be able to progress? It works fantastically where it works, but the Government are not funding it properly.

Q41 **Tom Hunt:** I saw a bit of adult education and how it worked in Cambridgeshire, and it really was not working at all. It was incredibly centrally driven. It was completely about bums on seats. We had highly



educated people from around Cambridge doing basket weaving courses and turning up in their Beamers to do this sort of stuff. There was very little levelling-up agenda or focus on social mobility, et cetera. What seemed to work, though, was when we had some devolution and part of the adult education budget was moved down to a new mayoral combined authority. That seems to be working a lot better, so now in Cambridgeshire they have linked the adult education strategy with the local industrial strategy and there is a real focus on skills and a place-based approach.

On the White Paper and talking about getting to a more place-based approach, a more ecosystem approach, do you see devolution as part of improving the offer when it comes to adult education and lifelong learning?

**Jane Hickie:** The adult education budget was halved. The AELP have asked that its current level of funding is tripled, because while it is working with devolution, it could work better. There is some confusion about the different pots of funding and bringing together things like the National Skills Fund and so on. Our position is, yes, it is working, but it needs a bit more investment. It is essential that we provide that investment for adults now, particularly in response to the pandemic when we are going to see unemployment levels rising and rising. Additional support for that is the AELP position.

**Stephen Evans:** First, I think we definitely need more funding, because it has been halved over the last 10 years. Secondly, I will say a bit more on the funding rate, which I think has been frozen for something like six or seven years, which is the equivalent to a 15% real-terms cut. Thirdly, and very importantly—this is where the question was coming from—thinking about what we are trying to achieve. We know there are some brilliant community inclusion benefits, individual health and wellbeing benefits, as well as people finding jobs and building careers. I think it is focusing on that and measuring some of that, and less of the bums-on-seats funding formulas that have sometimes come in the past. We have seen through our work with lots of mayoral authorities that they are starting to tailor provision for their local areas, whether it is more funding for shorter courses in Greater Manchester, looking at those on low pay in London, or some of the examples that you have mentioned as well, and fitting it in.

This is the point I was making at the start, that learning and adult learning and skills are part of our strategy for health and wellbeing, productivity, employment and all the rest of it. How do we join those things together so that learning is a golden thread that runs through those other policy areas? I think local areas have a big role to play in that, and I am hoping the English devolution White Paper that is coming up soon will talk about some of that as well.

**David Hughes:** I think the issue goes back to this planning bit, doesn't it? What we are saying is that we need a national set of priorities and



then every place needs a plan. Where there is an elected Mayor, the Mayor will be absolutely central to that planning, working with employers and other institutions, working out who delivers what. Where there is not an elected Mayor, you still need the plan. Devolution is partial in skills, and we need to reflect that in the role of players at local level, including colleges, in coming together for a local place-based plan.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** Tom, you may be reassured to know I was in Cambridge virtually last week talking to the team there. You are absolutely right, there is no doubt that devolved spend and integrating the adult education budget with all the other funding has definitely made a huge difference to the east of England corridor. I was in Liverpool yesterday virtually where they are doing exactly the same, looking at how they have more devolved funding to put households into work where you have four generations of people in the same household who are potentially out of work now. We need to get much more local and much more personalised in how funding flows into the towns, cities and regions. We need to be asking what is going to happen to the NRS. It should be at about £2.6 billion now, and that should be available in a pot somewhere. I think we are all hoping to see what is going to be said about the NRS.

Q42 **Chair:** Can you explain the acronym for our viewers?

**Kirstie Donnelly:** The national retraining skills fund that was announced in the previous comprehensive spending review, which was a significant number over five years. By now, given the time that has elapsed, I worked out it would be about £2.6 billion. This is a brilliant opportunity to get that out into the devolved regions and think about using it on exactly what David and Jane were just talking about, really good short course provision that helps bridge people from one job to another.

Q43 **Christian Wakeford:** Kirstie, it sounds very similar to what we were discussing yesterday in Greater Manchester. I completely agree, I think having a one-size-fits-all policy clearly is not going to work, either nationally or regionally. On devolution, we might need to go a step further than looking on a regional basis and look almost on a county or borough basis, because Bury will have completely different needs to neighbouring Bolton or Rochdale. We have spoken previously in this Committee about the funding and how that may look in practicality. One thing I am particularly keen on is flexibility of the levy. If there is one particular ask that anyone has of funding, other than more of it, where would that be targeted best and what would be the best outcome we could have?

**Bill Watkin:** We would say that the very idea of targeting funding is probably less helpful than raising the base rate and allowing individual institutions to deploy resource according to where they see need.

**David Hughes:** The average college has about 30 separate funding lines, but it has probably only three key customers: young people, adults and



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employers. What we need is a simplification of the funding, with much greater clarity about the purpose and the priorities, which absolutely have to be national and local. If we could get that strategic intent clearer, the funding could be much easier because it could be more general. It could go to a college to be able to decide what they deliver in that locality and in discussion and agreement with partners, including elected Mayors, local government and employer organisations.

Q44 **Chair:** How many funding pots should there be?

**David Hughes:** I think there should be one for colleges, I really do, and that we should have a strategic focus on what is delivered.

Q45 **Chair:** Would you still have a separate funding pot for apprenticeships though?

**David Hughes:** I think there does need to be a separate one for apprenticeships, working with employers, definitely. But colleges deliver lots and lots of different things, and they are beset by bureaucracy that costs an enormous amount of money to manage.

Q46 **Chair:** When you propose this to Government, what do they say?

**David Hughes:** They get very nervous, and they get very worried about accountability. What we end up with is colleges being accountable for bums on seats but not for outcomes and not for delivering the right things to the right people to deliver the right outcomes. That is what we want to focus on.

Q47 **Chair:** Surely that is what the White Paper should be on, it should be based on outcomes. Are the students getting good outcomes when they leave the college? Are the colleges meeting the skills needs of the nation? Are they helping the socially disadvantaged?

**David Hughes:** Yes. As Stephen said earlier, are they helping improve productivity? There is a basket of outcomes that I think we could all agree on. The funding should be supporting the delivery of those outcomes, not bums on seats, which sometimes delivers the outcomes, but does not always.

Q48 **Chair:** At the moment, what you are saying is that the measurements are based on tractor production rather than the actual grain produced.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** Yes, it is input.

Q49 **Chair:** It is input, yes. If you were in the public sector, it would presumably be a lot easier to deal with that.

**David Hughes:** Yes, it probably would. It is a good argument for it.

**Chair:** Okay, I am not saying either way. I am open minded about it. I am just keen to know.

**David Hughes:** You are not agnostic then, Rob?



**Chair:** I am not agnostic like you, no. I am just keen to know the different views on it before making a decision.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** To a certain extent, David said it all. If I was really going to answer the question I think Christian was asking, I would probably say that right now, because of the Covid context, because we cannot ignore what is happening, I would direct it on the shortest intervention with quality that is going to deliver someone into good work. I would take all the funding possible and direct it in that way. I would apply more flexibility to funds like the apprenticeship levy to address some of the challenges that the Chair was talking about earlier.

Q50 **Christian Wakeford:** Coming back to a point that David raised, simplification of funding would go a long way but it sounds like—and correct me if I am wrong in paraphrasing—if there was one message that you are sending it is to trust those FE centres to make that decision more locally rather than having to jump through hoops just to get the funding that you require.

**David Hughes:** It is more than just to trust them; it is to have a system that requires colleges to work with partners locally to be able to come up with a plan that then gets funded. It is not just trust, although trust and relationships are important, but it is an absolute system that requires them to do that and to have that relationship with universities, schools and independent training providers to deliver.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** But it has to be a plan supported by employers as well. It can't just be colleges.

**David Hughes:** Yes.

**Bill Watkin:** I want to stick an oar in for an alternative view about what education is for. It is not all about getting people into the workplace and so on. I take exception with something David just said, but the Secretary of State said it recently as well. There is something about learning for learning's sake. There is something about learning at a certain age to take you to the next stage in your journey, whatever stage that is. Let us keep a broader view of what education is all about, rather than just concentrating—

Q51 **Chair:** To challenge you on that, would you not take that as a given, that everybody knows that the significant purpose of doing education is for education, intellectual development and having that important intellectual and educational experience? At the end of the day, surely the wider purpose has to be to do everything possible to get a young person a good, decently paid, skilled job at the end of it.

**Bill Watkin:** I do not think you can take it as a given, because in driving forward a particular agenda there is a possibility that policy decisions are reached that do not necessarily take that as a given. It is something that we need to be conscious of throughout the conversation.



**Q52 Ian Mearns:** I thought we might stray into this territory of “what is education for?” at some stage. I think there is a real danger that we have strayed too far down the road of creating the next generation of units for the labour market as opposed to creating the next generation of well-rounded human beings. That is a side issue.

I want to go back to David’s point about colleges being responsive to their local context. Since the incorporation of colleges in particular, there has been a lack of local accountability in where that fits in. I think public versus private sector has to be thought about in the context of working with a whole range of partners within the local context. It is also being accountable to the locality in what is being delivered and how responsive learning providers are to local market needs but also to the local context within which they find themselves. Do you have any comments on that? When you look at the governance of colleges in particular, it seems to be a merry-go-round of the usual suspects turning up on different boards.

**David Hughes:** Governance varies. There is some fantastic governance going on, but what we do not have is a requirement on colleges to have that local plan and to work together. You have a very competitive environment in which schools are nabbing some of the young people, as Bill was saying earlier. Universities are getting into technical learning because they are desperate for numbers. What we need is a much clearer space for colleges to operate in where they can come up with that local plan with partners, including employers, the local authority, the NHS and a whole range of third-sector organisations. It is that requirement to plan locally, to be accountable for delivering outcomes, that we want, and then I think the governance will follow. You will end up attracting into it the people that you want, who do want to help develop local accountability in the context.

**Jane Hickie:** To pick up on apprenticeships and the levy point, I think the discussions that were had prior to lockdown about the pressures on the levy, while they have slowed down, are going to come back. Originally it was thought that there would be 50% of the levy left to spend. The popularity of apprenticeships has meant that is not the case. There is a huge portion of the market that is not able to participate adequately—SMEs, forming 98% of the market. What we are asking for is a standalone budget for SMEs, who support a lot of the entry-level apprenticeships. The lower-level apprenticeships are the ones that support those who are most disadvantaged. We need to be taking a look at that and to be properly supporting our young people.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** I wonder whether it is an opportunity also to rethink the role of apprenticeships for young people versus the role of apprenticeships for older workers, and to rethink how and where the funding should be prioritised and flow between young people starting an apprenticeships and the value of apprenticeships for older workers. We know they are incredibly valuable, but we cannot ignore the context we are in today. In that case, are there different options that we can make





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available for older people while protecting apprenticeships for younger people?

**Q53 Chair:** While I recognise what Bill said about education, given there is an important need of the country, or the state, for jobs and skills, given that we have Covid, given the job market is going to be pretty tough and given that the fourth industrial revolution may sweep away millions of jobs, it is the first duty of colleges, apart from education, to make sure that young people have good outcomes and that they also meet the skill needs of the nation. We are at a serious crossroads. Having a well-rounded education is important, but if they come out without a job for a few years, or a graduate job or a skilled job, that is a problem.

**Bill Watkin:** I do not disagree with that, but when you say it is the first duty of colleges, I wonder if you are thinking particularly of a certain type of college. I do not think it would be right to say that it is the first duty of, for example, a sixth form college, because they are not geared up to be measured by how they prepare students for employment as the next step in their journey. It will be another one or even two or three steps down the journey before they are in employment. As I said earlier, they will develop skills that will make them the professionals of the future, and we need them just as much as we have always needed them.

**Q54 Chair:** Yes. You know I agree with you on a lot but, going back to Tom's very good question about not having silos, I think all these things are linked together. All parts of FE should be linked together as a train going to a destination, that you hop on and off and get your different credits and qualifications, and it is very flexible, but the end goal is always the same, which must be the skill needs and good employment outcomes.

**Bill Watkin:** Agreed, yes.

**David Hughes:** I just want to try to link the two. I do not think they are mutually exclusive. What we are talking about is developing citizens, people who are well rounded, who can participate in our political democracy, who can get good jobs in the long term and who can support the community they work in. More and more employers are looking for those rounded skills, rather than necessarily the narrow, technical, academic skills that young people and adults have. I do not think it is mutually exclusive, it is both. Any local plan developed with partners would be about inclusion, and labour market, and progression. It would be all of those things. I do not think there is any tension here. What we need is good jobs for people for life. We need training and retraining across that life course. That is lifelong and academic. It is both.

**Q55 Chair:** In the last few minutes there are two things I want to do. One is to ask you very briefly what the White Paper should say about adult and lifelong learning. Secondly, if you could have three things that are not motherhood and apple pie stuff—substantive, realistic things—in the White Paper, what would they be? Perhaps you would like to answer both those questions together, just because of time. They are linked. I will



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start with you, Bill.

**Bill Watkin:** I would prefer to leave adult and lifelong learning to people who are far more expert than me.

**Chair:** That is fine, for obvious reasons. Just do the FE part for the White Paper, three substantive things that are realistic and would make a difference.

**Bill Watkin:** It is absolutely essential that we protect the Applied General qualifications, the BTECs and so on, because it is going to disenfranchise huge numbers of young people if we do not do that. Secondly, we must make sure that the funding levels are fit for purpose. Thirdly, we have to make sure that we take a rounded approach to opening new provision for 16 to 18-year-olds and make sure that we are joined up.

Q56 **Kim Johnson:** I personally benefited from adult education and lifelong learning. I know a number of people who were failed by the education system, pigeonholed as not being able to achieve, who went back to FE, gained qualifications and now have successful careers. It is about putting some importance on funding where it is necessary to provide those opportunities for people who have been failed by the education system in their earlier years.

**Chair:** I agree. I also think it is an incredible bridge as a first step for people who want to put their toes in the water, especially community learning.

**Stephen Evans:** On lifelong learning, I think we have gone backwards from a low base, so I think it is very important that we reboot and invest and increase participation. I am sure I will agree with what others say about other groups in the White Paper, but on what the White Paper can do to expand lifelong learning, No. 1 is to set the higher ambition that I talked about earlier, backed by investment. We argued for another £1.9 billion per year across England, which would help to double attainment of basic skills at level 2 and level 3 and to reverse our decline down the international league tables.

Second is a lifelong learning entitlement for people. Kirstie talked a bit about this earlier. We talked about the complication of funding streams for colleges and others, but the entitlements for individuals seem too often to be a set of riddle-me-this eligibility criteria. I would like to see a broader lifelong learning entitlement come forward, that includes retraining and the right to retrain, which is part of the Government's plans.

Lastly, investment in learning and skills as part of a local ecosystem where we measure the outcomes. Why not think about the funding streams that are going into a local area and say, "This is how many people we think could get into work. This is how many people could improve their productivity or their earnings", and we will judge it on that, rather than where all the individual funding streams come from? Let's



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have a pilot of that. We worked with the Local Government Association on a proposal for that called Work Local, which would provide a bit of a template to try to draw some of those things together and focus on outcomes. Those are the three things I would focus on.

Q57 **Chair:** Will you send that thing you just mentioned to us?

**Stephen Evans:** Yes, absolutely. I am happy to.

Q58 **Chair:** Thank you. David Robinson next, please.

**David Robinson:** My three priorities for the White Paper are, first, funding, which we have all said a lot, so I will not add more to that. The second is ensuring that we do not just focus on T-levels and higher technical qualifications but also focus on the tail of underperformance we have. We have 43% of young people not achieving a level 3 by the age of 19 and some of the lowest numeracy and literacy across developed countries. That needs to be addressed as part of the White Paper. Lastly is closing the disadvantage gap. As I mentioned earlier, we see disadvantage continuing to have an effect, certainly during 16 to 19—

Q59 **Chair:** Yes, but how? That is very good, but what I am looking for is substantive stuff. We all agree with that. What does that mean in practice?

**David Robinson:** Okay. There is a strong argument for expanding from the area-based disadvantage funding to pupil-based funding, student-based funding, possibly through a pupil premium.

Q60 **Chair:** Okay, thank you. Jane?

**Jane Hickie:** On lifelong learning, referencing back to the German system, if that is a road we are travelling, we need some assurance that there will not be major culling of qualifications and that the rich variety of qualifications available to people for the purpose of lifelong learning is maintained. On the three substantive asks, one is putting the apprenticeship funding on a long-term, sustainable footing, which is about allowing the levy payers to use the levy as they wish, and having a standalone budget for SMEs—they represent that 98%—so they can support additional apprenticeships. Better support for level 2, to support that ladder of opportunity. That is not sufficient currently, so seeing that handled better would be good. More investment in the adult education budget so that works better in this area.

**Kirstie Donnelly:** A lot of it has already been said. I think they are interlinked. We need to address adult lifelong learning. Adult lifelong learning should be the ecosystem that underpins the FE White Paper. The FE White Paper should be looking at lifelong learning that goes all the way through the transitions that we were talking about before, even as far back as 14, as Kim was referencing. There needs to be more investment of funding into lifelong learning, with exponentially more put into adults. As part of that, as I said earlier, potentially an entitlement,



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like the lifelong learning entitlement, for careers advice and guidance, an entitlement specifically to help people through those transitions. That would be one of my three wishes.

Another one would be, as David said, a national plan for skills, but one that is then devolved locally and regionally with flexible funding to having flexible skills credits, and all sorts of flexibilities that can respond to the local needs of Cambridge, versus the local needs of Manchester, Liverpool or wherever.

My third one would be for us to reimagine how learning can be delivered and supported by using digital transformation, because it is not going to go away. If we had been better equipped to deliver digitally, as some other countries have been internationally, we would have been in a very different position over these past few months. I do not think it is about having the same sort of provision that we have today, but rethinking the physical infrastructure of what is delivered where, including the role of employers owning more of that delivery. Therefore, I would probably say it is more an employer-owned agenda than it is solely a state-owned agenda.

**David Hughes:** On lifelong learning, Augar got this right. We need a rebalancing of investment post-18 so that everybody is supported throughout their careers. It is really clear, go back to Augar. The White Paper has to deliver on Augar as well as the Dame Mary Ney review, in my view.

My three are a national strategy that is backed up by place-based plans in collaboration, so working with everybody in a locality: colleges, schools, independent training providers, universities, employers, local government, et cetera. That would be No. 1. Secondly, I want colleges to be funded to provide advice directly to employers in specialised sectors of the economy that need it, so that they can provide that impartial advice on behalf of the whole of the education system. Thirdly, I want Dame Mary Ney's nurturing relationship implemented. That will need a complete stripping out of bureaucracy, moving to outcome-based funding, and a much more mature, strategic relationship between Government and colleges.

Q61 **Chair:** That is very helpful. How receptive are they to the simplification and outcomes of the funding streams, and so on?

**David Hughes:** We are certainly discussing it with them at the moment, and I am hopeful. I am optimistic because, in the end, you need a little bit of faith that that kind of system will work. I am convinced it will work, but we need to give them the trust and faith that it will.

**Chair:** We will discuss this as colleagues but—I am speaking for myself here—it sounds fundamental and a very sensible suggestion. Thank you very much. I do not think my colleagues have any further questions. Thank you very much. It was really invaluable. We could probably be



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here all day talking about all this. I think what Tom Hunt said about all of it being a seamless washing line or train journey, rather than having silos or a series of clothes pegs—that is what you were saying, I think, Tom—is really important. That should be part of the White Paper, how to link it all together and to be flexible, as you said, David. I would love for people to be able to hop on and off, and maybe they might do a small community learning course but that would be a credit to something. Then they might go on to FE, or they might do something at HE level, an apprenticeship or a course through a private training provider, but everything builds up in a way that it does not at the moment; it is all disparate. That was very well put, Tom, and everybody.

Thank you very much indeed for those questions. Thank you to the witnesses. We wish you all good health, and we will be keeping an eye on the White Paper and making sure we have a proper input to it.