

# Education Committee

## Oral evidence: [Opportunity Areas](#), HC 2026

Wednesday 1 May 2019

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Ben Bradley; Marion Fellows; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell; Mr William Wragg.

Questions 1 - 94

### Witnesses

Lauren Barnett, Member, Norwich Opportunity Area Youth Board; Simon Carnall, Member, Derby Opportunity Area Partnership Board; Graham Cowley, Chair, Blackpool Opportunity Area Partnership Board; Clare Hutchinson, Member, Oldham and Bradford Opportunity Areas Partnership Boards; Duncan Jacques, Member, Bradford Opportunity Area Partnership Board; Dr Fiona McMillan, Chair, West Somerset Opportunity Area Partnership Board; Chris Starkie, Member, Norwich and Ipswich Opportunity Areas Partnership Boards; and Nicola Swaney, Member, Derby Opportunity Area Partnership Board.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Blackpool Opportunity Area](#)

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## Examination of witnesses

Lauren Barnett, Simon Carnall, Graham Cowley, Clare Hutchinson, Duncan Jacques, Dr Fiona McMillan, Chris Starkie and Nicola Swaney.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning everybody. Thank you very much for coming. You may have seen some Select Committee sessions in the past, but this one is going to be more informal, so you have nothing to worry about. Welcome, everyone. I notice the DfE is here, busy prepping everyone up, so thank you for that.

If we could go around the table just to introduce ourselves; I will start with myself. I am Robert Halfon, the Chair of the Committee.

**Ian Mearns:** Ian Mearns, MP for Gateshead. I have been a member of this Committee for nearly nine years now.

**Dr McMillan:** Fiona McMillan. I am the Chair of the Opportunity Area in West Somerset.

**Marion Fellows:** Marion Fellows, MP for Motherwell and Wishaw. I have been on this Committee for four years almost.

**Simon Carnall:** Simon Carnall, Head of Community at Derby County Football Club, and I sit on the OA Board in Derby.

**Graham Cowley:** Good morning. My name is Graham Cowley. I am the Chair of the Blackpool Opportunity Area, and I am also a director of the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership.

**Lucy Powell:** Lucy Powell. I am the MP for Manchester Central. Apologies, because I have to leave in just under half an hour. It is nice to be here at the beginning.

**Chris Starkie:** My name is Chris Starkie. I am the Chief Executive of the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership, and I sit on the partnership boards of the Norwich and Ipswich Opportunity Areas.

**Mr Wragg:** I am William Wragg. I am the Member of Parliament for Hazel Grove in Greater Manchester, and I have been on the Committee for a few years.

**Duncan Jacques:** Duncan Jacques, CEO of Exceed Academies Trust in Bradford and member of the Bradford Opportunity Area Board.

**Nicola Swaney:** Good morning. I am Nicola Swaney, Education Manager at Rolls-Royce. I sit on the Partnership Board in Derby and on the Broader Horizons sub-committee.

**Lauren Barnett:** Lauren Barnett, and I sit on the Youth Board in Norwich.

**Ben Bradley:** Ben Bradley, Member of Parliament for Mansfield.



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**Clare Hutchinson:** Clare Hutchinson, Director of Network at the Careers and Enterprise Company, and I sit on both the Oldham and Bradford Partnership Boards.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. According to an official evaluation progress report on Opportunity Areas in October last year, for some there was frustration that lower progress had been made than expected. If I just quote it, "Across OAs it was felt that the ask of measuring the impacts of the programme would need to extend over five to 15 years in order to capture the longer-term effect of their work on social mobility." Another suggestion was that the "DfE should consider extending the timeline of the programme to reflect the concerns identified by interviewees and ensure the programme has a realistic prospect of achieving cultural change."

What can we expect to be able to measure reliably whether any of this is working? Will we have enough information by the end of the initial term to decide whether it is worth carrying on?

**Dr McMillan:** Can I start with a very small Opportunity Area in terms of numbers but a very large Opportunity Area in terms of geography? It would be fair to say that by the end of the three years there will be things that we can say we have done and we have achieved, and there will be things that people will say they have got out of the Opportunity Area.

In terms of long-term change, that is a short time in the history of West Somerset. In an area that has for a very long time felt itself to be out on a limb both geographically and in terms of experience and aspiration, there is a real need to make sure that we do not end up doing something for a short time and then assume that everything else will be great. The issues are much broader than the educational attainment issue. This is about connectivity, it is about geography, it is about abilities to get from one place to another, all of those things. It is a long-term programme.

Q3 **Chair:** Would anyone else like to comment? Are you all right that we call you by your first names?

**Nicola Swaney:** Certainly in Derby we have already seen good progress, particularly in the early years, which is our priority 1. We are very pleased about that, but we would welcome an extension to the programme.

In the area of my particular interest in terms of careers, when you put interventions in and work in the primary level and the secondary, it takes a few years to filter through and to see how many are coming on to apprenticeships and other programmes. We will always focus on sustainability as well as these programmes, but we certainly welcome an extension to it.

Q4 **Chair:** We spend roughly £72 million on Opportunity Areas, plus £24 million on the new Opportunity North East, even though we do not yet



know the likely impact that this investment will have. This funding targets 12 areas of the country. I want to ask whether we could gain far greater reach and be more certain about impact if we spent it on other interventions like improving the quality of teaching.

**Chris Starkie:** Your first question was, how do we know we have made good progress when we are dealing with generational issues. It was an interesting debate for us, as it will be in the other Opportunity Areas. Do you focus in a three-year programme on short-term wins so that you can go back to the Department, so you can appear before a Select Committee, and say, "We have achieved this in a very short period of time."? As partnership boards around the country, we thought, "We do need to show some evidence, otherwise we will get the question, 'What have you done in a short period of time?'" but also recognising these are longer-term trends where we need to put some building blocks in place that can be sustained.

Across the programme, we have demonstrated some short-term successes, bringing partnerships together, bringing groups of individuals who would not have sat around a table together, let alone worked together. There are some individual examples of really good progress.

Secondly, we would all I think agree that the programme needs to be sustained because we are dealing with, say, a 20-year project in a three-year window.

To answer your specific point about whether it should be spent on improving educational attainment, you will find a lot of the investment in the programmes has been spent exactly on that and doing it in a fairly focused and targeted way. In our examples in Norwich and Ipswich, I accept that £72 million is a lot of money, but spread across the areas, across the periods, it is not that much. We have had to be quite careful on how we spend it. I am sure there will be lots of examples from other areas.

A good example is what a difference a day makes. What can you achieve in a day? This was about how you improve the educational attainment in GCSE English and maths. It was a really focused effort encouraging young people to participate after school in a collegiate way, and making, shall we say, the extra work and extra revision seem like something they want to do, not something they are being dragged off the street to do. It is turning it into a positive thing that they want to do as part of their futures. It is some examples of projects like that, which I think have been a good test bed, that should be rolled out elsewhere.

Q5 **Chair:** Guests, if we could be slightly more concise, because there are a lot of people. I say that very gently. Thank you.

**Graham Cowley:** In answer to that specific point, why don't we just invest in improving teacher quality? In Blackpool, that is certainly something that we do, but the Opportunity Area has given us the



opportunity to look at the bigger picture. Improving teacher quality is vitally important, but what about those young people who are not engaged in mainstream education? It gives us the opportunity to link initiatives associated with improving inclusion together with improving teacher quality. Once they have had a great education, what happens to them next? How do we link with enterprise and how do we get them into work and further education? Again, the Opportunity Area provides us with an opportunity to think about that wider spectrum and achieve the outcomes that we are looking for.

- Q6 **Chair:** Let me put it another way. One analysis suggests that 27% of pupils in the lowest fifth of attainment are found in the bottom-performing fifth of local authority districts. Is there a risk, therefore, that by concentrating on specific areas the Department is missing the majority of low-performing pupils? What is the right balance—I want to try to understand—between focusing on low-performing individual pupils, wherever they may be, and area-based interventions?

**Dr McMillan:** One of the things that we have done in West Somerset is try to use interventions, especially at early-years stage, with families who have not normally engaged with the education process. We have done that through the early-years settings, but also through connecting with the voluntary sector. People who have access to families that would not normally engage are engaging with them, sometimes in fun activities, things that have already been said.

- Q7 **Chair:** I understand that is good work, but my point is that just 27% of pupils in the lowest fifth of attainment are found in the bottom-performing fifth of local authority districts. What I am trying to understand is whether a place-based approach to dealing with this problem is the right one.

**Duncan Jacques:** One of the key things and the legacy of the Opportunity Areas will be the work that is being done will be able to be shared across the country. Examples of innovative practices that go on in all the Opportunity Areas—a new way of working—could be rolled out further down the line to other communities across the country.

- Q8 **Chair:** Does anyone else want to comment on that? Finally, before I pass to my colleagues, the Opportunity Areas—you have highlighted this already—cover a lot of ground. In the Hastings Opportunity Area, you have four priorities, which are improving literacy, raising attainment in mathematics, improving mental health and resilience, and broadening horizons, as well as developing skills and employment. Then, alongside this, there are two underpinning themes of quality teaching and good attendance from early years to further education.

The Opportunity Area programme splits £72 million between 12 areas. Is there a danger that we are spreading resources too thinly across a very, very broad range of issues? Is there perhaps more value in concentrating on fewer issues, rather than this huge thing that I just set out on the



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Hastings Opportunity Area, and getting it right in each case? If your answer to this question is no, that it should concentrate on a huge range of areas, what evidence are you relying on to be confident that the dispersed approach is likely to provide a good return?

**Graham Cowley:** Chair, again I would suggest that that £6 million investment into Blackpool has to be put into the context of the massive amount of investment that is going in across a confetti of other initiatives to address education and social mobility. For me, the value of that £6 million has been certainly its convening power, its ability to pull together the other initiatives and link them under a common vision and extract far more value from them.

A big learning point for me personally has been to understand the locked-in potential of value that is within all of these stovepipe initiatives. This convening power that the relatively small amount of Government funding has given us in Opportunity Areas has produced massive value, in my opinion.

Obviously, the measurement of that is a longer-term issue and we have talked about that, but I would say that we are seeking proxy indicators that show movement towards an end goal. As we carry out more work, we will get an evidence base that will show shorter-term proxy measures that will indicate the right direction of travel.

Q9 **Mr Wragg:** In regard to the question I was intending to ask later, it might be worth asking it now, given that it deals with funding. You mentioned there the confetti of projects that might be in existence already in a particular area. I am curious to know as to how you decide, how you allocate, and the amount that you allocate, and whether those are new programmes or projects, or are you complementing existing ones? No one expects people to be reinventing the wheel, clearly. I am curious as to how this £72 million perhaps augments the existing provision. Does anybody have any thoughts on that? Maybe Graham, because I referenced the confetti.

**Graham Cowley:** This was the first point that I certainly picked up in Blackpool, that there was so much already going on. We did not want to be another initiative that was done to Blackpool. I wanted to map what was going on already and to do the latter: to complement exactly what was going on, either by helping them to link themselves together, certainly by filling a few small gaps, and also potentially turbo-charging some of the things that were really showing that they were working. That was basically our initial approach.

Q10 **Mr Wragg:** How did you determine those particular projects? Had you measured their success previously?

**Graham Cowley:** First, we listened to people. We did a massive amount of work on the available data to underpin our priorities. We then looked at projects that fitted underneath those priorities. We then looked at the



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evidence base for efficacy of those projects. We looked at the sustainability. So it goes.

**Dr McMillan:** One of the critical things about all of this was to create coherence. There are lots of individual projects that act almost like silos, and the danger is that you end up with people reinventing wheels a lot. If I take, for instance, my colleague from Rolls-Royce, if I take the issue of careers advice and guidance and working with employers, those schools—and in our case there is only one secondary school and two middle schools—were absolutely overwhelmed. Employers were saying, “We do not know what to do. We do not know where to look to support our schools.”

One of the things that we have been able to do within the Opportunity Area is to create a coherent programme of careers advice and guidance, working with the CEC, working with our own Education Business Partnership and working with the different entities—the Hinkley Point programme, for instance—to create something that everybody understands as a vehicle for ensuring there is better advice and guidance.

Coming back to the idea of how you ensure you are getting value for money, it is about people working together. In our area, early years providers, up until the Opportunity Area, were working in isolation in an extremely geographically dispersed area. We needed to bring them together to help them to work better and to higher quality.

**Duncan Jacques:** I would like to echo that. The Opportunity Area Boards have people around the table that have not normally sat together. We have been involved in the DfE for a number of years. We have taken a number of off-the-peg solutions. This was a completely different way of working. This was looking at it from a user’s perspective: what do we need and how do the off-the-peg solutions fit into that, as it were? How can we augment it? How can we improve it? I think it has been really successful so far.

Q11 **Chair:** Just to clarify, this was from the official evaluation report on Opportunity Areas last October. In addition to the £72 million of DfE core funding, the Opportunity Areas were offered access to a wide range of initiatives: the Strategic School Improvement Fund, the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund, the Essential Life Skills programme, the Maths Hubs, Careers and Enterprise Company, National Citizen Service, and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme. Some experts believe that there is a risk that the Opportunity Areas might be drawing disproportionate attention away from these other initiatives and that this could drain the pot of additional resources available to other areas that are very disadvantaged but do not quite make the cut as an Opportunity Area. What is your view about that?

**Duncan Jacques:** There is never enough resource to go around in terms of—



Q12 **Ian Mearns:** You are happy to get your cut of it?

**Duncan Jacques:** I am not saying that at all. I am saying that a line has to be drawn somewhere.

Q13 **Chair:** What I am trying to say is there are a lot of existing schemes going on already, and are you just not yet another scheme? Are you not sucking money potentially away from these already existing schemes and from other areas of the country that may need it?

**Duncan Jacques:** We have to look at legacy. Three years is not long to turn around a social mobility issue nationally. This is an opportunity to focus ideas and skills, look at innovative practices, and see if there are benefits to the rest of the country from what can be learned in Opportunity Areas.

Q14 **Chair:** To what extent do you believe that the Department has a steer on the potential consequences of money being sucked away from all the other schemes? Does it have systems in place to ensure this is not happening?

**Dr McMillan:** There is a danger and there was a danger of too many initiatives being, for want of a better word, dumped on a particular problem, with the consequence that if you are, for instance, a headteacher in a very small rural school, you are going to feel overwhelmed by all this attention. That is why the Opportunity Area has provided that coherence, that ability to create a one-stop shop. If you do not do that, you probably are not going to get the benefit from the other interventions either.

For example, Teach First. A great scheme, but making sure that schools that have limited resources to support new teachers have a way of working together to get the best out of that has made it a better scheme and a more useful scheme in an area where teachers are traditionally quite isolated.

Q15 **Chair:** How do you know?

**Dr McMillan:** How do I know? Because we currently have four Teach First people, whereas before we only ever had one.

Q16 **Chair:** Yes, but that is about inputs, not outputs.

**Dr McMillan:** It is, but they are also doing a very good job, and they are doing a better job because they are also getting the support of the teachers around them, rather than having to do it on their own. Traditionally, I think I am right in saying that Teach First people have come and then they have moved on quite quickly. What we want is to make sure that we have a sustainability, so that you have sustainable experience for young people, rather than having somebody brilliant for just a very short period and then they disappear off to better and bigger things and bright lights. It is quite important to have them see this as something they want to put a commitment into.





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Q17 **Ian Mearns:** I am interested in exploring how each individual area's delivery plan was drawn up. Obviously the delivery plans are there to address key priorities. Were the key priorities determined locally, or were they handed down as key priorities based on data that the DfE was aware of?

**Duncan Jacques:** I think it was a combination of the two. Certainly data were used to identify areas for development or areas of significant weakness in terms of some of the outcomes for some of our pupils across the city, and then the delivery plan was drawn up by the Department for Education in conjunction with partners around the table. It was not "done to". It was a collective decision to drive and to apportion funding to each of the priorities.

Q18 **Ian Mearns:** The delivery plans and the key priorities for the different areas are different in different places. There are some common themes that seem to go through a number of different areas. Those key priorities and the delivery plans, from your perspective, were drawn up in conjunction with the DfE but with a lot of local input?

**Duncan Jacques:** Absolutely, and learning from other Opportunity Areas as well.

**Clare Hutchinson:** I was involved in the delivery plans for a couple of areas, and there was a huge amount of data gathered, as Graham mentioned, but quite a lot of stakeholder engagement as well. There was very, very wide-ranging stakeholder engagement. From that, the partnership boards came together and looked at the data and what local stakeholders wanted, and drew together that delivery plan.

Q19 **Ian Mearns:** In terms of the stakeholders around the table in each area, who got the job of picking who the stakeholders would be?

**Simon Carnall:** I will give you an example of how I engaged in that. I was approached as a stakeholder initially before I came on to the OA board a year and a half in. One of the challenges that I gave to DfE was to get it to go out to an even greater list of stakeholders. For me, I was pushing them to go and meet other people who maybe they had not already met because, from a local level, who knows the place better than we do on that level? For me, it was around challenging them to go and see the smaller community groups as well as the bigger, established organisations and educational establishments. I think that, in Derby, they did that brilliantly.

Q20 **Ian Mearns:** Does anybody around the table think that the key priorities that have been determined in each area are exactly the right ones, or would you like to finesse them from a more local perspective at all?

**Chris Starkie:** Your question was about, were the data given by DfE to it? The reality is the DfE did not have enough data. It was very good on schools data, but the wider social mobility area is a specialty; it is not even its department. We pulled a range of different datasets together.



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Have we all created the perfect plan? With the benefit of hindsight, I am sure we would all like to tweak and evaluate it. What we all did was we took the evidence, looked at what were then the issues that were particular to our area, and then set a number of quite wide-ranging priorities. The earlier point from the Chairman was, should we have been tighter? I think one of the learnings is that we have tightened and sharpened as we have gone through. The answer is that they were definitely locally driven and much more locally driven than they would have been under, shall we say, regime normal from the Department.

**Q21 Ian Mearns:** I am interested in what you said at the start there, though, Chris, in terms of the DfE not having enough data and not having data that were available from other Departments. I sense in my mind an element of silo thinking on behalf of the DfE, which had not pulled the relevant data together for each geographical area before it came to the table.

**Chris Starkie:** Schools data are with the benefit of the local authorities, but wider social mobility data is the purview of other Departments. In our area, we encourage the DfE to work with other Government Departments, to Housing and Communities or Cabinet Office and so on. We saw that as an opportunity for greater cross-departmental working in our area.

**Nicola Swaney:** In Derby we have identified three priorities. The first two are linked to the data, absolutely, and they were issues that we were already aware of in terms of attainment in the early years and at other stages in the careers of students.

The third priority, which Simon and I particularly work on, is about broadening the aspirations of young people and widening their opportunities. This is something that, as a city, we have not come together before to do. I think the strength of the collaboration is working closely with the primary and secondary headteacher colleagues on the board and in the different sub-groups, plus working with business, culture, arts and sports for the first time, looking at a coherent programme, and also, yes, signposting through the myriad opportunities that there are in funding streams and making it a locally-based, valuable offer that we can talk through the teacher so they can access it and make sense of it. There was a lot going on. There is a real strength in our third priority because it is so different and it is so targeted on Derby.

We have a fantastic range of employers in the city, large and small. A STEM focus. Some are bringing arts into STEAM as well. I see that as a real priority for Derby, and that is working well so far.

**Dr McMillan:** One of the really important groups that we have wanted to engage with is parents, and parents not just from the perspective of supporting their children but also raising their own aspirations. One of the really valuable things that we have done is to support teaching assistants, some of whom are parents, to think about how they might



themselves develop their aspirations, perhaps into teaching, but just to recognise that many of those parents are quite isolated. Their situations both in terms of home and ability to move around the area and outside the area is limited, having a recognition that education is part of a wider community, and often parents are the way into that wider community. We have wanted to work closely with them at both ends of the spectrum, both as parents of children but also as people with aspirations of their own.

**Q22 Ian Mearns:** Lauren, you are a member of the Youth Board in Norwich. Talking about that wider community in terms of engaging and finding out what people's priorities are, do you feel as though young people in your area are engaged with and listened to from the perspective of drawing up the plan?

**Lauren Barnett:** Yes, I think so. On the Youth Board, we have come up with three main projects. Some of the projects were not directly related to the priorities that were set out in the delivery plan, but then the Partnership Board saw that they were going to be really effective.

We have one project where we are running some classes for parents with English as an additional language, and their children are in workshops next door. The parents are being supported and the children are being supported. In one of our schools, the Hewett School in Norwich, 33% of parents are EAL. We recognise that with one of our priorities, which is to reduce exclusion. In those workshops we can address children's behaviour and help those parents, and then we can address the priority 3.

**Duncan Jacques:** It is about bringing other people around the table. One of our priorities is about removing health barriers to learning. The NHS has been sat around our Partnership Board. We have linked quite a lot of our work, one of our priorities, to the Born in Bradford survey, which is a massive survey that has been going on, to see if we can link health issues to educational attainment.

One of the things is Glasses in Classes. Opticians come into schools, checking kids, giving them glasses in the school to make sure that they can read and see what is there. We are looking at that with control groups and other things. It has brought in money from other organisations as well, such as the Centre for Educational Research. There is a good example there of bringing other partners around the table.

**Q23 Chair:** Could we try to bring in everybody? You are all very welcome to chip in.

To be clear, can we try to understand what the difference is between what was going on in the area before and how Opportunity Areas have improved? What was not happening before in these areas that now is, given all the existing schemes that I mentioned earlier?



**Graham Cowley:** For me, it is about this sense of coming together, of collaboration, of people sharing a view, being aware of what everybody else is doing and being able to work with them. For me, that is the biggest change that I have seen. That is under a shared sense of purpose. They are not just doing it because—

Q24 **Chair:** You had those kinds of thing. You had Strategic Regional Improvement Boards, or SRIBs, or whatever they are called. People met together. You have Local Enterprise Partnerships, people meeting together. Why do you need to create a new structure?

**Graham Cowley:** Indeed, Chair. The first of those was specifically looking at school improvement. The second of those was specifically looking at economic developments and enterprise. Opportunity Areas looked at the bigger picture—

Q25 **Chair:** And skills.

**Graham Cowley:** And skills. The Opportunity Area is able to bring those together. In my board, we have a representative from each of those around the bigger table that is looking again at buying into the shared sense of purpose and then taking that back to the activity that is going on in the other forums.

**Simon Carnall:** In Derby, something that we have done is through the ELS fund, and it is bringing the cultural partners together with the partners around sport and leisure in the city. Historically, while we have not necessarily been competing against each other, we have been working in silos.

Q26 **Chair:** Why couldn't the local council have done that? You could have had a local council education committee, unit or whatever you want to call it. If it is just about shared practice and bringing people together, you do not need to create a new structure and spend £72 million. You could have just asked the local council to bring you all together.

**Graham Cowley:** With respect, we have not spent £72 million on creating a structure, I have to say.

Q27 **Chair:** There is £72 million going to—

**Graham Cowley:** Yes, indeed.

**Simon Carnall:** For me, the money has just been the conduit, almost the glue that has brought people together. Before, yes, there were structures in place and there was a culture and leisure board in the city, but it was absolutely failing. People were not taking part in it because it was not shifting the dial. People were not seeing anything happening from that. What the Opportunity Area has done is galvanised the city. It has challenged the local authority to do better, if I am honest with you. For us, as partners, it has given us a focus to go, "We cannot just look after our own interests here."



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For years, we have talked about what a great job we all do individually, but we have been doing things to people for so long that things are getting worse.

**Chris Starkie:** To build on Graham and Simon's point, it has been an effective enabling group. I am ashamed to say that in Norwich the secondary heads did not even meet. The academies were in competition with each other. There was the issue about inclusion across the schools. Who can you drop your kid who has the problem in to? Our inclusion charter has brought them together to recognise that they cannot solve the problem by pushing the kids to each other's schools, so they are working collaboratively. There was not a route for education to engage effectively with schools.

At the start, the schools were cynical. They said, "This is just another initiative. This is just more Government dropping stuff down on us." Now, they are desperate to get involved with it. The proof of the pudding is the engagement we have now, compared with at the start. If it was working properly, absolutely, we would not have needed it.

Q28 **Chair:** We do not have proof of the pudding because we do not know the outcomes yet, as you said at the beginning.

**Chris Starkie:** That is absolutely true, but in terms of the input engagement momentum and so on.

Q29 **Chair:** There is no proof of the pudding yet because we do not know the outcomes, to be fair.

**Chris Starkie:** The input to the pudding.

Q30 **Chair:** Yes, but inputs do not mean outputs.

**Duncan Jacques:** Our areas were identified because things were not working before.

**Dr McMillan:** It depends what outputs you are measuring. If you are measuring people's engagement, I think we could show that there is considerable engagement now where there was not before.

In terms of why it was not happening before, we have a very fragmented system of education. We have three multi-academy trusts, all operating independently before the Opportunity Area, and we have a local authority that does not have the resources any longer—whosever's fault that is, it is the case—to be the conduit of bringing things together. I think that is the role that the Opportunity Area has fulfilled.

Q31 **Ian Mearns:** Duncan, to be fair, you put your head on the nail, as it were, earlier on. The Opportunity Area, the fact that it exists, not only gives you an amount of money to bring things together, but it also puts you at the top of the heap when applying it to other national pots. That is obviously an advantage from your perspective on a locality basis. I think you would all accept that.



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In terms of the delivery plans themselves, there have been accusations in the educational press that the DfE has exerted a lot of centralised control on the Opportunity Areas. In terms of when you drew up your draft delivery plans, were they in any way edited or changed by the DfE centrally?

**Graham Cowley:** Yes. I do think we benefited from input from the DfE, but I go back to the process that Duncan outlined before. They were definitely driven locally, definitely. We had partnership workshops, and then we tested the priorities that were created from that with the evidence and challenged and made sure that we knew the right things.

I can tell you the only thing that was shoehorned into the Opportunity Area planning in Blackpool was that we had to work with NCS. We had to work with the National Citizen Service. They were not particularly active in our area, but that was a national thing. That is one area that DfE insisted upon. Other than that, it was absolutely our plan.

**Clare Hutchinson:** I found that it was much more about tried-and-tested activity and programmes rather than being very innovative and trying something totally new. The steer from DfE was much more about, "Here are some programmes where there is an evidence base that they do work, and, therefore, consider these when you are drawing your plan up." It certainly was not a case that we were told what we had to do.

Q32 **Ian Mearns:** In other words, you were given a range of available tools, and the expectancy was that you would use them?

**Clare Hutchinson:** It was that we would certainly consider them. We did look outside of those. We looked at other local activity that was under way, different programmes that were working. Whenever we considered a programme, it was about the evidence base that they had already developed as to whether it worked or not.

Q33 **Ben Bradley:** Can I get my thoughts on the record first and foremost, I suppose, that I share the Chair's concerns around the specific geographical areas for the funding? As a representative for Nottinghamshire, Mansfield appears at No. 8 on the list as my constituency, and most of Nottinghamshire is on that list as well, in the top 50, and we do not get any of the help and support. Obviously, in making these specific geographical funding areas, you create some friction there as well. There are areas that are of concern to me. We have talked about—and members of the panel have touched on—challenges in terms of funding for schools and local authorities, something that we all recognise, and whether, the more and more of these programmes that are added in, the less money there is available for that core funding for schools and local authorities. There is certainly a challenge there, although I absolutely recognise the benefits of these programmes for the areas that have them.

I wanted to carry on on the theme of DfE engagement and involvement in this. Some of the evidence and initial feedback from stakeholders has



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suggested the DfE has quite a controlling hand in how this works. Obviously, the idea and the principle of it is that it is locally driven and locally led.

I wondered, perhaps to the Chairs first and foremost, how independent do you feel you are, or how does that relationship work with the DfE?

**Dr McMillan:** I believe we have become independent. Initially, I would say there was an assumption that we would need a lot of help—probably we did—and there was an assumption that all of the interventions that were there to be drawn on were things that we would benefit from. What we have been able to do as we have matured is to be able to say, “Actually, this part of the programme is a really useful thing, and we want it, and we would like more of it. This bit has been less helpful.”

If I take, for instance, the CEC, initially our relationship was probably not a strong one. There were other things that we had developed because we needed to as an area. That relationship has grown and developed as we have sat around the table and worked things through. The biggest benefit of this programme has been the opportunity for people to sit together, work out what works and what does not work, and use the interventions and the support that comes from the DfE, rather than everybody saying, “There is this thing, and maybe it is going to help and maybe it is not.” We have been able to become much more analytical about what is useful and where we go.

The really critical thing from your perspective, if I may say, looking forward, is that the evaluation that we have is a place-based evaluation. You and we want to know how we make the most of this programme looking forward, and indeed how you might then want to roll it out to other areas. There are some real benefits of people locally taking responsibility and being able to use those things that are out there.

Q34 **Ben Bradley:** I certainly look forward to seeing how we can roll the benefits out to other places, from a selfish perspective.

**Graham Cowley:** I have little to add. Same journey: kind of control at the beginning, trust and relationship built up. It is far more interactive now. Frankly, we do benefit from the involvement of DfE. There is no question. There is a lot of expertise there and a conduit into other areas of Government. There is a mutual respect.

The DfE does facilitate all the Chairs getting together once every couple of months. I am happy for us to do that in private so that we can air our concerns about Government Departments. It is not defensive behaviour from it at all, really. It is just helping us to get the right answer.

**Dr McMillan:** Could I possibly say that I think it would be even better if we had engagement from other Departments? For instance, if we had engagement from BEIS. At the end of the day, our responsibility is also for those young people who are looking towards employment and employability and support in terms of employers engaging with



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education. I sit on the Heart of the South West LEP. I Chair the people leadership part of that. Getting employers to recognise how to engage with education is a big issue, and we need to have employers really working together.

**Q35 Ben Bradley:** I totally agree, and the Chair touched on a number of other organisations who are supposed to do that as well.

You mentioned the National Citizen Service. Obviously, DfE requires you to work with it. I am a big believer in the potential of the National Citizen Service. The evidence suggests it does not really function in the way that it should or work in the way that it should. Is that an example of the DfE saying, "You must work with a Government project," even though it is not necessarily the best approach?

**Graham Cowley:** The straight answer to that would be probably yes, at the time, but what has happened since is that the NCS is not particularly active in Blackpool. When we get together as Chairs, I can see that there is some fantastic work going on in different places with NCS. It just does not seem to be happening here.

With CEC, we have a brilliant working relationship. There is a lot of joint activity going on there. We have moved more towards flagging those things as, "These look like they are going to work," to, "What actually works in your locality? Go after that." That is where we are now.

**Clare Hutchinson:** We would fall into the category of one of those organisations that were asked to work in all of the Opportunity Areas. At that time our network across the country was just growing, so although we had some activity going on probably in all of the Opportunity Areas in some small way, it just meant that we could really redouble our efforts and make sure that we prioritised those areas while we were still building the network across the country. It is more a case of not necessarily imposing it on an area, but making sure that we were committed to supporting the work there.

Given that we were asked to drive employer engagement in Opportunity Areas and our remit is to increase the number of employer encounters for young people, we were happy to do that by putting in some really key things around funding co-ordination, which brings capability, developing business leadership, and we have a couple of examples in the room today, and also careers leadership, which again helps build that capability and the legacy.

**Q36 Ben Bradley:** Finally from me—sorry to focus on you two in particular, but you are probably the most direct connection in terms of this question—you mentioned getting together and having the opportunity to talk about the Department and to criticise, potentially. Do you feel you can do that? How vociferously can you defend your local issues when ultimately both of you were appointed by the DfE? How independent and genuinely locally-based can you be in that scenario?





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**Dr McMillan:** I feel pretty independent. I feel able to be critical where I think it is appropriate to be critical. I have worked closely with our DfE-appointed co-ordinator, who, in her turn, then works with the programme based in London. We can criticise things, we can plan new things, and we can address challenges. That is what the board is there to do, to be honest, and I certainly have never at any stage felt I have not been able to say what I think.

Q37 **Chair:** Before I come to Marion, you mentioned that there was little input from the BEIS Department. What about the DWP?

**Dr McMillan:** Again, I would say we could do with a more active, proactive response.

Q38 **Chair:** Is that the case across the board?

**Chris Starkie:** Yes. One particular point is that we, through our efforts, managed to get Opportunity Areas into the Industrial Strategy, so they do feature in there thanks to that bottom-up effort, shall we say, rather than top-down.

Q39 **Chair:** You are talking about being joined up, that these Opportunity Areas are helping you be joined up, yet there is no joined-up Government if you are only having input from the DfE. There is huge overlap between DWP work programmes, mentoring programmes, housing programmes.

**Ian Mearns:** Health.

**Chair:** Health and so on. That seems to me quite strange. If these huge Opportunity Areas are going to be created and all this enormous amount of money spent by the Government, it seems strange that there is no joined-up Government, that there is just one Department involved. I will come on to you in a second, don't worry.

Given what you said about business, which is crucial in terms of skills, it goes back to the point that I raised earlier. Rather than creating a giant new body, you could have something from the Local Enterprise Partnership, perhaps, which may have meant more business involvement from the beginning, or the local mayor doing it or a designated person from the DfE, and using the existing bodies rather than creating this new Opportunity Area organisation, which, as you have acknowledged, does not have even joined-up Government.

**Dr McMillan:** The Local Enterprise Partnership is represented on it, partly through me but also through the Chief Executive. He sits on it. Businesses are represented. Again, I represent the nuclear industry, and then we also have other representatives. We also were saying, within our strands, we have other contributors from the communities. The one that relates to enterprise and skills has other businesses on it.

The issue is that in terms of Government strategy and Government planning, the Opportunity Area is seen as a DfE initiative, as opposed to being seen as a whole-Government initiative.



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Q40 **Chair:** My answer to that would be, so what? There should be joined-up Government.

**Dr McMillan:** There should be joined-up Government, especially if you are talking about something that is place-based.

Q41 **Chair:** When you were set up, did the DfE give you targets? Did they say, "You have a problem in your area—let us say with early years—so, therefore, if we set up this Opportunity Area and we give you all this money to sort it out and have all these joined-up bodies in your area, we expect early years to be improved by X over the next few years."? Are there any goals that they give you when these things are set up?

**Chris Starkie:** We set the targets with the DfE. The delivery plans were locally driven. The evidence was, clearly, there was an issue in each of the areas under—

Q42 **Chair:** Given that the DfE has set Opportunity Areas up in certain areas where it feels there is a lack of attainment in certain areas of education and skills—

**Chris Starkie:** The precise targets were set locally and agreed with the DfE.

Q43 **Chair:** Given those, surely they would say, "We have set you up with that specific reason, so, therefore, we expect you to improve by X or Y." Have they done that?

**Chris Starkie:** Yes.

Q44 **Chair:** Give me an example of how they have done that.

**Duncan Jacques:** Over the three-year programme we are hoping to move 50<sup>1</sup> of Bradford's schools that are judged to be "requires improvement" or "inadequate" to "good".

Q45 **Chair:** Did the DfE say that is what it wanted when it set it up?

**Duncan Jacques:** When we looked at the data together, that is something that we collectively came up with. Early years is a good example because we felt in Bradford there were enough initiatives around early years for the Opportunity Area not to be driven on that, along that line.

Q46 **Chair:** Finally, on the business that you were told you had to have NCS, even though it was not active in your area, why couldn't you have gone back to them and said, "Actually, the Scouts are really big locally, for example, and cost a lot less and do a lot more."? It may not be the case, but just to give an example. Why could you not have gone to them and said, "That is what we want to do. It is much more effective and much more popular locally."?

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<sup>1</sup> The Department for Education subsequently clarified that the published target is 25.



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**Graham Cowley:** In due course I did, Chair. The issue was that to get the delivery plan over the line, frankly, it was just, "Yes, okay, whack them in there." When we came to implement the delivery plan, it was apparent that it was pointless banging our heads against that particular thing because there were far better things going on in Blackpool that would achieve the same outcomes. We were allowed to follow the correct path.

Q47 **Chair:** What did you do instead of NCS?

**Graham Cowley:** What we have is supporting through essential life skills a whole range of those aspirational activities: Duke of Edinburgh and what-have-you.

Q48 **Marion Fellows:** I am fascinated by all this and the idea of partnership working. I have already said privately that it is what is common in Scotland.

Anyway, at the initial evaluation, some stakeholders questioned why some individuals were invited to join the Partnership Board but not others. Is this something that you have been aware of, any of you?

**Graham Cowley:** I have been aware of the criticism that this is the same old group of people around a different table or whatever. There is some validity in that challenge, frankly, that it is.

The way that ours developed was that we looked at the delivery plan first and we looked at our priorities. Rather than casting out and forming a Partnership Board there and then, ours grew. It evolved. It evolved through need. Who was going to be able to help us deliver those priorities, and who was going to be able to speak for their individual community? Really, that is how it evolved. We are always open to changing, and changing quite regularly, depending on what the plan has suggested we need to do next.

Q49 **Marion Fellows:** Pitching X against Y: has that affected collaboration in your area, or have you managed to avoid that? Have you managed to take people who were initially unhappy with you further along the journey?

**Graham Cowley:** The answer is absolutely, yes. Chris said earlier that in Norwich the secondary heads were not meeting. It was the same in Blackpool. They are now. We have been able to convene the collaboration. We have been able to use the authority of DfE, the little bit of funding that we have, and a general approach about wanting to work together and not to duplicate. We have been able to use all those things to bring people together.

We have challenging meetings, don't get me wrong. This is not Cosy Club. I had a Partnership Board yesterday and it was challenging, but it is a pleasure to be involved in that. We get the right course of action in the end through that debate.



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**Simon Carnall:** A quick one from me. What we have done in Derby is, as well as having the main stakeholder board, we have the sub-groups. We have the early years, we have the primary, secondary, we have the further and higher education, and then we have the broad horizons. I was not initially on the main stakeholder board, but I could still contribute through one of those sub-group boards. Subsequently, I have come on the board, so that just shows that there is movement between the two as well. Anybody who was feeling that they were on the periphery has been brought into it in that way.

**Chris Starkie:** On day 1, Partnership Boards were created both in Norwich and Ipswich and, interestingly, Norwich was wave 1, Ipswich part of the wave 2, and there definitely were some learnings in Ipswich from wave 1. Wave 1 did some things that wave 2 learned on. I suspect that is true across the piece. Why are these people sat around the table? The Chair and DfE have been relatively flexible about enabling other people, where appropriate and relevant, to join the board, and indeed through the sub-groups.

As I said before, part of the reason the heads thought, "Why do we get involved in this?" was because there were so many initiatives. A lot of our schools in both Ipswich and Norwich are poorly performing and have had lots of initiatives just thrown at them. Was this just another one? What I think some of the Chairs have said around the table today is that this has been a process of helping them cope with all of the things that are being thrown at them, providing a more effective, more streamlined framework for these hard-pressed heads to operate in, so they can see real value in that. There is a little bit of resource, but the resource probably has not been the key driving thing. It has been helping, trying to simplify the spaghetti of different initiatives and so on.

**Dr McMillan:** It would be fair to say that it has been quite an inclusive process. We have not said to people, "You cannot be involved." In fact, initially, I suspect the view was a sceptical one. "What is this going to do?" Persuading people to come on to the Board was more of a problem than keeping people off. As Simon says, the sub-groups have been a really useful way of galvanising activity.

An example of one of the things that has happened: we had a lot of voluntary organisations like the parks and other outward-bound activities all doing their own thing, independently, wanting to get work from the schools, and in a sense almost in competition. What we have been able to do is create a framework where people work together. There are lots of people who need to be engaged, who are not engaged. How do you work together to create a framework where people see this as part of their right to be involved in all of these things? It has been changing that momentum, I think.

**Nicola Swaney:** I would like to agree with that and add that in Derby the Opportunity Area has given us the opportunity to work on a new



primary business links programme. Usually, you focus on business links at secondary level, but I am really certain that we need to intervene at a younger age. Children at very young ages, three or four, have these outdated stereotypes and myths around what careers they should be going into and what engineering is like and so on. It has given us the opportunity to focus on a coherent package of support for the primary level in Derby, but also focus specifically on the seven most disadvantaged wards. It is targeting those students—those pupils and also their families and wider communities—who need that support the most.

**Q50 Ian Mearns:** As the discussion this morning has developed, we are getting a clear message that one of the major strengths is that the partnership is bringing stakeholders to the table, developing collaborative working, all of that. Of course, we have also acknowledged, by the way, that because of silos in Government, important Government Departments are missing from the table, so that is something we have to take back and make recommendations to Ministers about. Are you talking to each other? Are the Opportunity Areas regularly talking to each other?

**Dr McMillan:** We have a Chairs' meeting, as Graham said, once a—

**Graham Cowley:** Once a week.

**Q51 Ian Mearns:** Who dictates the agenda for that?

**Graham Cowley:** Funnily enough, we are individually asked to contribute to agenda items, so what do we want to discuss, and would we be willing to lead various discussion items? Again, it is quite a collaborative process. It is not driven by DfE although very much facilitated by it. As I said earlier, there is also an opportunity, with no agenda, for us to meet for an hour before, as Chairs alone, to discuss any concerns that we have and share those issues that we can then feed in to the Minister when the Minister comes to the formal meeting.

**Q52 Ian Mearns:** In terms of developing professional good practice, how is that disseminated between the different partnerships?

**Duncan Jacques:** The wave 2 Opportunity Areas certainly learned in terms of even setting the priorities from wave 1, so there is that collaboration. I know the Chairs meet. In terms of sharing good practice, that is probably legacy, is it not, in terms of moving that forward and sustainability? That is the next stage.

**Nicola Swaney:** It is a fair point that you raise, and I think it is important that the Opportunity Areas do share that good practice and are more enabled to do that. If you are not a Chair, usually we are talking to the DfE and asking them, "Do you know of any examples of good practice in the other Opportunity Areas that we could draw on?" If we could be facilitated in perhaps sharing more among members of the board and sub-groups, that might be quite valuable.



**Q53 Ian Mearns:** While it is not an Opportunity Area, Opportunity North East, which has been established by the Government and overseen by Lord Agnew, we are told engages in this sort of collaborative work. Is that true?

**Graham Cowley:** Certainly from an enterprise point of view—Clare I am sure will come in on this—we have learned lots from what is going on in the north-east around Gatsby benchmarks and enterprise engagements and all that. In fact, a chap who led that, an ex-deputy headteacher, came down and spoke at one of our partnership meetings to help us learn the lessons that had been learned up there. We have a Holiday Hunger programme just about to develop. We know that Stoke does that really well, so we have been to Stoke and had a look. Those things are ongoing, as well as being a legacy for the future.

**Chris Starkie:** As for Opportunity Areas in the east of England, which Robert knows well—Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, Norwich and Ipswich—we have had three conferences bringing the three Opportunity Areas together, not just the chairs, but all the Partnership Boards, to share best practice and so on. Obviously, Norwich and Ipswich were under one Local Enterprise Partnership, and some of the programmes indeed have been shared.

**Q54 Chair:** Sadly, not one in Harlow, where we have a lot of deprivation. It is a wonderful place with a lot of—

**Chris Starkie:** We would happily work in Harlow as well.

**Chair:** You would be very welcome.

**Q55 Ian Mearns:** Clare, you represent the Careers and Enterprise Company. What is the relationship between the Opportunity Areas, the Careers and Enterprise Company as a strategic partner, and the DfE, which makes the decisions?

**Clare Hutchinson:** We drive the agenda because it is very localised. Going back to the original question about the sharing across the areas, at a strategic level we have many of our senior staff who sit on the Partnership Boards. We meet monthly and share what is going on and how we can work across the areas. Then, on the ground, we have enterprise co-ordinators who are delivering and leading it in each of the 12 Opportunity Areas. We bring them together internally so that they can look at some of the issues that they are trying to overcome and share good practice. Nationally, we bring all the enterprise co-ordinators together regularly.

You mentioned Opportunity North East. There is some really strong practice in the north-east. Tees Valley LEP and North East LEP are really leading the way on this, and we take that good practice and share it not only across the 12 Opportunity Areas, but across the rest of the country.

**Q56 Ian Mearns:** How does Opportunity North East engage? Two of you have



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mentioned information and benefits and good practice that Opportunity North East is putting into the matrix, but what is it getting back?

**Clare Hutchinson:** It is the same. It is the sharing of practice. In the North East LEP area and also in Tees Valley they have careers hubs that we have put in there, so they get involved in the learning and development that is coming out of all of the careers hubs as well as the Opportunity Areas. It is very much a two-way process.

Q57 **Ian Mearns:** When it comes to organising all this, the relationships between the Opportunity Areas, who is it that is going to drive that? Is it yourselves?

**Clare Hutchinson:** We drive that, yes.

Q58 **Ian Mearns:** Not the DfE?

**Clare Hutchinson:** No. We drive it ourselves.

Q59 **Chair:** First, going back to my question about the influence on the DfE, an official evaluation of Opportunity Areas in October last year suggested that the DfE may be stifling local autonomy. Several stakeholders, "Observed that sometimes the Partnership Boards felt too led by the DfE and not driven enough by a representative selection of stakeholders, and some stakeholders considered that delivery plan development had been driven too heavily by the DfE."

Is there an inherent contradiction in rolling out a place-based, locally-led initiative that is strongly influenced by Whitehall? Does the DfE have more plans to extend your autonomy? If not, why is it reluctant to delegate authority?

**Dr McMillan:** Obviously, the evaluation process is looking backwards to a degree. Things have moved on from that. There was a stage, certainly in the earlier stage, where it was much more dominated by DfE than I would say it is now. That is because we have created our own momentum. One of the challenges looking ahead is making sure that that momentum does not then get lost by the whole thing disappearing. The money has been really useful, there is no doubt about it, and what the money has achieved is—I think Graham mentioned it—the glue. It is the bringing of people together. It is the enabling of things to happen. It is the chasing of things. All that stuff that does not happen on the day-to-day basis because you do not have the capacity.

**Ian Mearns:** There have been lots and lots of partnership initiatives initiated by Governments over the years. Once the money dries up and an initiative comes to an end, I am afraid to say experience shows that the partnerships tend to dry up as well.

Q60 **Chair:** The thing that concerns me about what you just said is that you are saying the money has been useful in bringing people together. It is all about inputs, rather than, "The money has been useful because we have managed to improve educational attainment for deprived early years by



30%," or whatever. That concerns me.

**Dr McMillan:** I have not expressed that as well as I should have done. I think it has enabled that to happen. What has then happened is you have had a whole raft of creative thinking that has emerged from those people coming together. The fact is that people working together work better than people working independently. We have seen that with our early-years settings, where originally they were setting their own policies and so on and doing it probably not terribly well. Now they have a quality hub, which is chaired by one of their members, and they are setting their own standards with the support of professionals.

**Chris Starkie:** Picking up on the money point, it brings people around the table. If you bring people around the table and say, "We should be doing this anyway. Go away and get on with it. Why aren't you improving stuff?", they will say, "We do not have the capacity, the capability or the resources to do it."

What we have been able to purchase is small amounts of capability, some capacity. A lot of it has been, "If you want us to do this stuff, a targeted initiative, a really focused thing," or, "We do not have enough time on the roll. We have to pay for teachers to come off the roll," and so on.

The money is being used not to bring people together. It is being used to deliver activity that we believe will achieve the outputs.

Q61 **Chair:** I am still not clear why the Government could not have said to the leader of a county council or the metropolitan council, whatever it may be, "This is what we want you to do, and you work with the Local Enterprise Partnership. We want you to bring these people together," without necessarily creating a whole new structure.

**Dr McMillan:** There is no capacity.

Q62 **Chair:** Why don't county councils have the capacity?

**Dr McMillan:** They are absolutely rock bottom.

**Chris Starkie:** There is a relationship issue, a trust issue between the local authorities and the academy trusts. I am new to this process, with a Local Enterprise Partnership background. The people we met for the first time around the table and so on, I was thinking, "Why haven't you met each other? Why haven't the heads met?" and so on. There was a trust issue, bringing an independent body. We, as the Local Enterprise Partnership, stepped up to the plate and said, "We will employ the local co-ordinator," because there was going to be some dispute about which academy would run it, or should it be the city? Should it be the county?

We have been able to drive forward partnership working and, in a sense, make things happen that you could argue should already have been happening.

**Mr Wragg:** I would say to our guests to take any scepticism of this





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scheme with a pinch of salt, seeing as most of the Members seem to want one in their constituencies. I say that is probably the proof of your—

**Chair:** There is a worry that money being spent in the Opportunity Areas may be diverting money from other deprived areas, and that is what Ian's point is.

Q63 **Mr Wragg:** Indeed. Absolutely. I wanted to ask Clare because I noticed that you are both involved with Bradford. The small matter of the Pennines does not mean that they are entirely different. There are a lot of similarities between them. They are old mill towns with similar ethnic diversity and so forth. We are asking about sharing practice, aren't we? You are probably on the panel today best placed to comment on that and how you are sharing that best practice between two Opportunity Areas.

**Clare Hutchinson:** I do find that some of the same conversations come up at both Partnership Boards, so I am quite well placed to talk about some of the ways that we have overcome challenges in one area compared to another. There are similarities in the priorities across the areas, but they are very localised, so each delivery plan is different. It is not a case of just picking up what is happening and working in Oldham and putting it in Bradford, but certainly I do have a unique view of them, and not just two, but several Opportunity Areas. I quite often visit the boards to share what is going on.

Q64 **Chair:** In two of the Opportunity Areas, again which are in South Yorkshire, there are political Mayors. Could not the political Mayors have done what you are doing without necessarily creating an opportunity area? They could have brought people together and schools together and businesses together.

**Chris Starkie:** They could have done, but in the Cambridgeshire SEND, I think the Opportunity Area came first.

Q65 **Chair:** They could do, is what you are saying?

**Graham Cowley:** Having no experience of working under an elected Mayor, Chair, it is difficult to comment. I am a bit shy of saying this, but the independent Chair role does seem to me to be pretty vital to helping build this consensus and collaboration. The fact that we do this in our own time and have no axe to grind and have no personal interest—we do not work for one of the charities or whatever—is a really powerful way of being able to bring people together. Again, that has been a learning point for me over the last couple of years.

**Dr McMillan:** We do not have a Mayor in Somerset or in the south-west, and we do have both a county council and district council. We do have multi-academy trusts, which are not responsible to the local authority. We have a very complicated structure.

One of the things that the Opportunity Area has been able to do is persuade, for instance, the new district council, which is made up of West Somerset and Taunton Deane, to consider how some of the aspects of



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the Opportunity Area would be things they would want to see carried forward. It is a signalling of valuable activity that should be sustained. I think, if I may say so, that the whole Government structure is complicated and is not joined up.

- Q66 **Chair:** That is very helpful. Could I end by asking you if we could go around the table and you could each perhaps give us one or two things maximum of dramatic changes that your Opportunity Area has been able to make since it has been in existence? I do not just mean about bringing people together, although that is important. I want to know what the achievements are to education and skills and attainment, and on the careers side.

Why don't I start with you? What difference have you made in terms of outputs in these Opportunity Areas since you have been involved?

**Clare Hutchinson:** We were tasked with driving up employer engagement, which is encounters for young people with the world of work. Looking at the data from the first year and the first term of the second year, over 300,000 employer encounters have taken place for young people between the ages of 11 and 18, and the evidence shows that that makes young people less likely to be NEET and to have better outcomes.

- Q67 **Ian Mearns:** It is easy speak, this, but 300,000 employer encounters? Is that group activity, face-to-face activity?

**Chair:** Is that once a year in an assembly?

**Clare Hutchinson:** It is a mixture. It is a mixture.

- Q68 **Chair:** Could an encounter be a once-a-year assembly with an employer? Does that count as an encounter?

**Clare Hutchinson:** It could be. We give schools a virtual wallet. They choose their provision from that. Within the virtual wallet is a range of tried-and-tested careers providers. They are local and national, and some of them are careers talks. Some of them are mentoring programmes or business and enterprise activities.

We believe that the schools know their pupils best, but supported by a co-ordinator they do a gap analysis, work out which pupils are not getting encounters, what type they would most benefit from, and the schools select them.

**Ian Mearns:** We have had this discussion before, Robert, in terms of careers activity. I am afraid to say, from my perspective, that is an input, not an output. That is an input.

- Q69 **Chair:** What has been the change in terms of employment in your Opportunity Area so far?

**Clare Hutchinson:** Most of the young people are still at school, given that we are just in the second year of a programme, and we work with



young people from the age of 11, so we cannot give you any data on unemployment at the moment, but certainly the feedback that we get from the programmes of activity is that often employers or some of the cornerstone employers are developing bespoke activity for young people. In North Yorkshire Coast, for example, Sirius Minerals, who are a committed local employer, created a bespoke programme of activity for a group of year 9 girls who were really disengaged from education. They took them into the workplace once a week for eight weeks and they are much more engaged now.

Q70 **Chair:** What do you feel has best added value to what you are doing?

**Lauren Barnett:** First, the EAL project that I spoke about earlier. That has been really successful. That has been commissioned to run twice more, two more 12-week courses. Secondly, the impact that it has had on the members of the youth board. Young, passionate people now feel like they have a voice and feel like they can change things. That is a really positive aspect.

Q71 **Chair:** Thank you for what you are doing as well. Nicola, what outputs can you point to that have really made a difference in your opportunity areas being in existence?

**Nicola Swaney:** Of course, in Rolls-Royce we already had a wide-ranging STEM outreach programme in Derby, but this Opportunity Area has enabled us to really understand the issues that schoolchildren in Derby are facing and the social mobility issues that we have in the city. It has caused us to then focus our inputs into those most disadvantaged wards and also, as I said before, given us the impetus to work with others and collaborate on a new primary programme, which I think is absolutely crucial to start that career understanding earlier, to banish those stereotypes and bring diverse role models into primary schools so that children can start thinking about what they want to do very early on, before they get carried away by stereotypes and make the wrong decisions.

Q72 **Chair:** Have you been able to assess any of the outcomes of all that work?

**Nicola Swaney:** Not yet because we have only just issued a contract for the provider for that piece of work, but we are going to meet monthly with that provider to look at the outputs.

Q73 **Chair:** How long has your opportunity area been in existence?

**Nicola Swaney:** We are in the second year now and have another year to go.

Q74 **Chair:** As yet, is there any data on the success that you have had in some of the work of your opportunity area?

**Nicola Swaney:** There is absolutely, in terms of early years. We have made great strides in improvement in the early years, yes.



**Duncan Jacques:** We are in the second year as well of the Opportunity Area. In the first year, there was concentration on getting the plan in place. In the second year, delivery. On impact measures, midway through, it is difficult to say. I would say 27 of our poorest-performing schools receiving expert support from the wider region is beginning to have impact. Forty-three new headteachers in Bradford receiving masterclasses in mentoring and coaching is something under that particular priority.

Q75 **Chair:** Do you know what has been the result of these 27 as yet?

**Duncan Jacques:** We are not at the end of the year, are we, in terms of when outcomes are measured? It is a challenge to give you that data at this moment in time.

**Chris Starkie:** I am going to cheat by giving you two, if that is all right, one from Ipswich and one from Norwich. The Ipswich one is brief, and it is "What a difference a day makes", getting kids in to go and do more maths on a Saturday morning and making it a positive experience. Five schools, £13,000 across the board. The output is an average of 1.3 grades higher per student across the board among the most difficult cohort.

I want to pay tribute to Lauren and the Norwich Youth Board for the Dragon's Den event they organised. We wanted not only to hear the voice of the youth more, but how do we understand the young people themselves? They organised a Dragon's Den event. I was fortunate enough to be one of the dragons. We asked secondary schools across Norwich to come up with ideas to improve social mobility, and I have to say the best ideas that we have had came out of that session. It was those ideas that we have put into practice.

Q76 **Chair:** What have been the outcomes? I want to know what real difference the grant made.

**Chris Starkie:** A group of kids from across Norwich went on a couple of days' trip to Southend to see excellence in action. That is—

Q77 **Chair:** Okay. That is the input. That is very important and very good, but what are the outcomes?

**Chris Starkie:** Yes, and the outcome is their report—

Q78 **Chair:** Social mobility, for example?

**Chris Starkie:** They reported back to the partnership board on the three things they would like to see in their schools that would improve social mobility in their view. The partnership board last week agreed to encourage the schools to act on them.

Q79 **Ian Mearns:** What can Ipswich learn from Norwich? Norwich is at the top and Ipswich is at the bottom.



**Chris Starkie:** You are not allowed to mention football in these four walls. The answer was the sharing. “What a difference a day makes”, one of the programmes, was so successful in Ipswich that it is now being done in Norwich.

Q80 **Chair:** Thank you. Graham?

**Graham Cowley:** Thank you. One example, for me, is defining the Blackpool career journey. It is setting the work that we do with Clare, CEC, the LEP and the Responsible Business Network into the context of the whole spectrum of life stages—primary years, transition, secondary—and in doing that work, we have glued together all of this activity to lead to the outcome that we want. I cannot give you the straight answer that you are looking for, Chair, that there are X number of people more—

Q81 **Chair:** There must be a couple of things or at least one thing you have done that you can say, “Well, we have made this definitive improvement and the data shows it.”

**Graham Cowley:** Certainly, working with the secondary schools, there has been a marked improvement in what is called the Gatsby benchmarks, the way that schools address enterprise.

Q82 **Chair:** How do you know this?

**Graham Cowley:** It has been measured.

Q83 **Chair:** By who?

**Graham Cowley:** By the schools themselves, and challenged with our co-ordinators.

Q84 **Chair:** Thank you.

**Simon Carnall:** There are two things from me. There is the data that the board have put together around early years and phonics. We have made huge strides—

Q85 **Chair:** Give me an example.

**Simon Carnall:** In terms of the phonics standard at age six, it has increased to 82% in Derby, which has gone over the national average for the first time ever<sup>2</sup>.

Q86 **Chair:** That is brilliant.

**Simon Carnall:** That was one, in terms of a clear output. The other one for me is around the work we have done with ELS. The “This is Derby” programme in the city has been absolutely incredible.

Q87 **Chair:** What is the programme, sorry? Say again?

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<sup>2</sup> The Department for Education subsequently clarified that Derby met but did not exceed the national average. 82% is the percentage of pupils in Derby and nationally who met the expected standard in the phonics check in year 1.



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**Simon Carnall:** "This is Derby". We were granted £1 million to deliver a programme for young people led by young people in the nine most deprived wards in the city, and with an SEND hub as well. We have two evaluation pieces running in parallel. One is around the impact on young people. This is a year's programme and in August we should hopefully have that report. The second one is a report on and an evaluation of the partnership. Does the partnership work? All the things that we have been talking about. Do the young people get moved along that social mobility journey and is the partnership working? That is the really exciting bit. We have the data bit, which I think is what you wanted to see, but we also have this really exciting piece around how to capture the impact of what we are doing.

Q88 **Chair:** Thank you. Dr McMillan?

**Dr McMillan:** A couple of things. One thing that we have done, which has had some real tangible benefits, is to focus on special needs, reviewing the teaching and learning approaches to special needs. As a consequence of that, in schools there has been a marked change in the way of teaching because there has been a focus on the quality of teaching as opposed to, "We need a teaching assistant to take this person away."

Q89 **Chair:** How do you know that?

**Dr McMillan:** I can give you a quote, if you like, from one of the primary heads, who said that they have had lots of support from the SEN adviser that was provided by the OA and they have changed a lot of what they have done, which means that a group of boys are making great progress now. In fact, one boy was three years behind in his reading when he was in year 4, and now he is year 5 and he is reading above his chronological age.

Q90 **Chair:** Has there been any data on top of that?

**Dr McMillan:** The SEN audit is being carried out and from that there will be some generic information that we can supply.

Q91 **Chair:** How much work are you doing, very briefly and maybe only one of you wants to answer, on data collecting to find out if what you are doing is working or not? Is that being done by the DfE or being done by you?

**Graham Cowley:** Both. We are swamped by data and we are information-poor. We need evidence. We need to be able to answer the really obvious questions that we are asking now.

Q92 **Chair:** I am just trying to find out; I am sure you are.

**Graham Cowley:** Yes. We have independent—

**Chair:** Are you making a difference, given the money that is being poured into your areas? Ian.

Q93 **Ian Mearns:** I believe that is the final question topic. We are doing a number of different inquiries at the same time and, in the last analysis,



this is about educational outcomes and life chances for young people. One of the things that we have been concerned about is the growth of off-rolling and, as a corollary, the growth of elective home education, or so-called elective home education. I am not for one moment criticising people who effectively home educate their children, as that is their right and many of them do it quite well, but there has been almost a doubling of the number of children who are electively home educated and many of them are not getting any standard of education whatsoever. What is happening in your opportunity areas regarding that?

**Chris Starkie:** Inclusion or exclusion, to put it another way, was one of the real concerns in Norwich. A large amount of effort has been put into developing the Norwich Inclusion Charter. This is really about how you persuade headteachers, hearts and minds, working together collaboratively across academies, and indeed working with the local authority. There have been a number of positive steps to include rather than exclude. That has been important, and I think it is a charter that bears rolling out to other parts of the country as well.

Q94 **Ian Mearns:** Thank you. Does anyone else want to add to that?

**Dr McMillan:** A really important part of that is how you make education valuable to young people who might not have seen it as part of their trajectory. You do that by ensuring, first, that they understand where that education will take them. The relationship with employers and employment experience is absolutely critical. Then you ensure that, as they get older, they have opportunities to learn in ways that relate to the employment experience.

One of the things we have done is to develop a number of very sector-focused work experience programmes, which we have called academies. Youngsters have the opportunity to follow an academy in, say, construction. Given that we have the largest infrastructure project on our doorstep, it makes a lot of sense. What that does is give them a horizon to look towards. We are doing some really good things on that front, but generally in education, if I may say so, we could do so much more.

**Chair:** Thank you. Can I say, first of all, a special thank you to you, Lauren? It is not easy to come to a Select Committee. It is easy to ask the questions, but much harder to answer them. A huge tribute to you, and I hope there are lots of you all over the country doing the same thing.

Thank you to all of you. We are just trying to understand what is going on. The questions are in no way critical of your work. The Committee does appreciate all the effort that you make in trying to improve education, skills and attainment in your areas.