

Education Committee

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

Tuesday 18 June 2019

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Lucy Allan; Ben Bradley; Marion Fellows; James Frith; Emma Hardy; Trudy Harrison; Ian Mearns; Lucy Powell; Thelma Walker.

Questions 2228 - 2363

Witnesses

I: Dame Martina Milburn, Chair; Sammy Wright, Commissioner; and Sasha Morgan, Director, Social Mobility Commission.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Martina Milburn, Sammy Wright and Sasha Morgan.

Q2228 **Chair:** Thank you very much for coming. Welcome. For the benefit of the tape, could you introduce yourselves and your titles please?

Dame Martina Milburn: Martina Milburn and I am Chair of the Social Mobility Commission.

Sasha Morgan: Sasha Morgan, head of the Secretariat at the Social Mobility Commission.

Sammy Wright: Sammy Wright, member of the Social Mobility Commission.

Q2229 **Chair:** Thank you. The terms “social mobility” and “social justice” are often conflated. Last time in your evidence, you described it as people thinking of it as a mobility scooter. My own experience in my constituency—as I think I mentioned before—is that people think it is a mobile telephone advert describing what social mobility is. Do you agree that social justice and social mobility are two different things, in that social justice helps the most disadvantaged reach the ladder of opportunity and is there should they fall, whereas, social mobility is focused on those who are already climbing that ladder?

Dame Martina Milburn: I wouldn't, not entirely. I think social mobility is a part of social justice. Obviously, at the moment, there is the debate about what it should be called and should we have a different sort of commission. You could, of course, but my concern would be that we have not really made much headway on social mobility. If you are going to widen it to social justice, you would need to put an awful lot more resources behind it and, secondly, I would be concerned at this point in time that you would lose some of the focus.

Q2230 **Chair:** What is your definition of “social justice”?

Dame Martina Milburn: I think social justice is much wider, so it looks at all kinds of aspects of poverty and disadvantage, for example drug addiction or alcohol addiction and things like that. It looks at it in a very wide way. I think it is very important—it is something that I have fought for all my life—so I am not saying we should not do it. I am just saying I think it is different to the definition of social mobility we have at the moment and to the kind of commission that we have at the moment.

Q2231 **Chair:** Just to reiterate, your definition of social mobility as you see it compared to social justice?

Dame Martina Milburn: At the moment, to put it crudely, the definition we work to is: it is the person's ability to do significantly better than their parents. That is how it is measured. That is how our remit was set up, to



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look at that and specifically to measure and look at it across Scotland, England and Wales but only to promote it within England. We have a very specific remit at the moment as the Commission.

Sammy Wright: Can I just add, in terms of what you said, you talk about social mobility as if it was about people who are already moving up and that isn't really how we have seen it. It is for every member of society to have those chances to move up, so that is where the social mobility and social justice intersect quite strongly there. It is in giving people the chances—

Q2232 **Chair:** They do not have those chances if they have domestic violence, child abuse or whatever it may be, and that is very much issues of poor quality housing and so on. Those are very much issues of social justice. You would have obviously seen our report on this that, surely, it would be much better to call yourselves the Social Justice Commission rather than the Social Mobility Commission because everything is so interrelated.

Dame Martina Milburn: It is interrelated but if we became the Social Justice Commission—which I think is wider—I would still want within that to have a real focus on social mobility. Domestic abuse is not limited to your social circumstances, so—

Q2233 **Chair:** Social mobility to me is just a buzz word. In essence, to most people it means opportunities for all but it does not make any sense to normal people on the street. Most people know what the word “justice” means. They may have different interpretations of the word “social” but they know what the word “justice” means, which is—

Dame Martina Milburn: I think that is completely right and I do not think most people know what social mobility means. Where we are within the Commission, is that it is about giving people a choice and people do understand that. At the moment, I think we have a lot of people in this country that do not feel that they have a choice. If we can do anything that is the bit we could start to shift. If you are going to widen it—and there is a good argument for doing that—you need to look at how it is resourced and what the actual remit of the Commission is going to be.

Q2234 **Chair:** My colleague will come on to some of this later, but when you came before the Committee you said you wanted a very unique and diverse range of commissioners. This is not meant to anything here but on your list you have the Group Director of Digital Society at BT, the editor-in-chief of Cosmopolitan. You have the Diana Award, Senior Vice President TK Maxx. There are a lot of people on here: the London School of Economics, the Managing Partner of DLA Piper and the Barclaycard Business Executive Officer.

You have a lot of people on here who are the great and the good. Where are the great disruptors, positive disruptors, real people working in grassroots charitable organisations—many of them have appeared before our Committee—who are really changing lives and know what goes on on the ground? Do you think the board of commissioners you have recruited



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is broad enough or is it just for the great and the good?

Dame Martina Milburn: No. I think the commissioners would be very surprised to hear themselves described like that. We have a commission and not a single person has had a public appointment before. Sammy clearly wants to say something here.

Sammy Wright: I was going to say that I have never been described as “the great and the good” before. I like it, but it does not seem to fit with my sense of myself.

Q2235 **Chair:** Who are the disruptors? Where is the person from a grassroots charity organisation, such as the lady who ran the St Giles Trust who talked very movingly about exclusions to our Committee”? Where are people like that on your board?

Sammy Wright: As someone who has worked in comprehensive secondary schools for 20 years and is currently a vice principal in a deprived area of the north-east, I feel like I am not in the mainstream of commissioners historically. As such, I do hope that in a sense I am a disruptor.

Dame Martina Milburn: We have three young commissioners, one of which is Jess, who you mentioned, who works for the Diana Award, who would also be extremely surprised at being described as part of the great and the good.

In terms of the regional representation, we have Newcastle, Bolton, Leeds, Birmingham, Basingstoke, Portsmouth, Fleet, London, Bristol, Norfolk, Bradford and Manchester. We had over 300 applications of which 50 made the strong list. We interviewed 35 and got down to 12. In terms of the disruptors, I would say it is virtually the entire Commission.

You also mentioned Sandra Wallace from DLA Piper. Sandra has an extremely strong social mobility background—

Q2236 **Chair:** I am not criticising the expertise and brilliance of the people that you have on the board. What I am saying is that there is an absence of people from grassroots’ organisations. There are a lot of people who are excellent people but you do not have many who are real movers and shakers, in terms of at the grassroots level of charities and community organisations.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, you do. You have Jess who has just got a new job working—

Chair: At the Diana Award?

Dame Martina Milburn: —no, no, working at the Roundhouse. She has just got a new job looking after their youth programme. She is 24 I think. You have Harvey who works at Blackbushe Airport on its youth programme and specifically with young people with disabilities. He has cerebral palsy himself. He is 20 years old. You have Saeed who is from



Bolton. He runs a youth magazine called “Explode” and an online presence, which is exactly about doing that, so I would really push back on that. We have a fantastic group of commissioners from a huge range of backgrounds with hugely different life experiences.

Sasha Morgan: Beyond that, I think you can take the titles but what Sandra talks very strongly about is being the child, who is the daughter of the school cleaner and of the mechanic, who is not expected to go to university and is a disruptor in her industry at a time when there was no expectation that someone with that background could make it, so these are people who have been disruptors in their industries.

Again, when you talk about Steve Cooper, yes, you can take his title—former head of Barclaycard—but he is one of the first people to be taken on that is not from a graduate background, an environment where being a graduate was the norm, for him to come through the business and say, “No, you don’t have to come from that background. There is nobody from my family that has been to university or worked in this kind of area”.

Therefore, these are people who are disruptors in their industries. One of the things I think you will hear from us today is the importance of employers in the employer space as a massive place when we are thinking about disruption and trying to make change in social mobility across the country.

Q2237 Chair: In terms of what you are doing, what do you offer above what many third sector organisations might offer? For example, your report—which is excellent—is a huge manual over all kinds of things in terms of this area, but why is that different from going onto the Rowntree website or the Centre for Social Justice website or the Sutton Trust website where you can also find very similar statistics? What is the difference? What is your value-added?

Dame Martina Milburn: I think the difference and the part that we can play is bringing some of this together and looking at where the gaps are. We have managed to secure £2 million-worth of funding from the DfE, which we can use for research projects, and we are specifically looking at where we see the gaps are so that—

Q2238 Chair: If I had the Joseph Rowntree Foundation before us or the Centre for Justice, they would be saying exactly the same thing, apart from the fact that they are not a Government body.

Sammy Wright: From my perspective, I came into this and there were various questions I had. I wanted to know about the wider picture in schools specifically, and what I found in being a member of the Commission is that again and again we come together, we discuss things and we look at particular issues. We look for information and it isn’t there. There are key things that we are interested in that we just do not know, so we were looking at early years and we did not have the key



information that we needed. No matter what the general space is there is a lot of information that is not out there.

Q2239 **Chair:** Your manual is superb for reference—everything that is in it—and I am not saying that you are not doing important work. All I am saying is that if we had the Sutton Trust or one of the major social justice think tanks they would be saying something very similar. What I am not quite clear about is: what difference do you make? What is your unique selling point other than that you are a quasi-Government organisation?

Dame Martina Milburn: I have had several meetings with the Sutton Trust. Peter and I go back quite a long way and he sees exactly what we have just said. We are in a unique position to be able to measure, which nobody else is doing and, secondly, to fill in the gaps. We have a joint piece of research with the Sutton Trust coming out next week, so I do think there is a role for the Commission to play in bringing all these different voices together—and there are a lot—and looking at where you can add value and where you can try to get some movement.

The bottom line is we have all this stuff but we have not seen any movement in social mobility, certainly for the last four or five years, when it has been measured equally. That is something unique that the Commission can do.

It also has unique access to some of the Government data, which some other organisations do not have, and what we are hoping is we can increase that access. I am being encouraged by the kind of work that the Race Disparity Unit has been doing. We met with the Unit and looked at where we could join forces, or with the Children's Commissioner, for example. Working in isolation would be a big mistake but if you put these things together; if we and the Children's Commissioner and any of the other commissioners all come out and say the same thing, people need to listen.

Q2240 **Chair:** You have specific powers to provide advice to Ministers at their request on how to improve social mobility in England. This advice has to be published. How often has this happened?

Dame Martina Milburn: Since I have been in post?

Chair: Yes.

Dame Martina Milburn: I don't think we have done it yet. We have just brought out the "State of the Nation" report, so our next plan is to write to all the Permanent Secretaries of the relevant Departments and highlight the bits in the report that we would like their Departments to take forward, and to write to the Chairs of the relevant Select Committees and say, "This is what we are requesting your Department to do".

Q2241 **Chair:** At the moment you haven't provided advice to Ministers?



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Sasha Morgan: We are about to publish a big report on the impact of extracurricular work, which was commissioned from us as a piece of advice from the Secretary of State. That will be the first piece of work that has been directly provided.

Q2242 **Chair:** Just for the benefit of those watching, how long have you been in post including the commissioners?

Dame Martina Milburn: Me personally, 12 months. The Commission has been up and running since December, so we have had six meetings. We meet once a month.

Q2243 **Chair:** In a previous hearing we asked if you planned to challenge the Government. You said you would first try to have the arguments behind closed doors. We said there should be a clear strategy and that you speak out boldly if necessary.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes.

Q2244 **Chair:** Since you have been in the position, how forcefully have you criticised the Government, both privately and publicly, when you believe that they may not have done enough to promote social justice?

Dame Martina Milburn: As I say, I don't think we have yet. We brought out the "State of the Nation" report. We are about to sign off our strategy, which will be ready by the end of the summer. We have commissioned £1 million of research, which will give us the facts so that we can then go in and have the conversations. As I say, we have had six meetings as a commission. I think we have done an awful lot.

Prior to the "State of the Nation" report we published two pieces; one piece of research and the social mobility barometer. What I found interesting about the "State of the Nation" report was that I understand the Government were not happy because social mobility had not improved, and the Opposition were not happy because it had not got worse.

Q2245 **Chair:** The Government responded to our report by saying they wanted increased ministerial engagement with you. How has that happened? How much of that has gone on?

Dame Martina Milburn: In terms of me talking to Damian?

Q2246 **Chair:** Well, ministerial engagement. That is what the Government responded to us. When the Government responded to our report they said that there would be increased ministerial engagement with the Social Mobility Commission. What I am trying to find out is: has there been?

Dame Martina Milburn: No.

Q2247 **Chair:** There hasn't been increased ministerial engagement with you?

Dame Martina Milburn: No. What we are now doing is writing to all the relevant Permanent Secretaries whose Departments were affected by our



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recommendations and saying, "This is what we would like to see you doing". We are also going to write to the chairs of all the Select Committees to say, "This is what we have asked the Departments to do".

Q2248 **Chair:** My final question before I pass over to my colleague is just to confirm: have you had an extra £2 million funding for research?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes.

Q2249 **Chair:** One of our recommendations was that there would be social justice impact assessments on Government policy. Have you thought of using this £2 million to do such a thing or how is the £2 million going to be spent?

Sasha Morgan: The £2 million was given very specifically to undertake classic research. It is not within the scope of that funding for us to utilise it for other purposes, so the commissioners do not have the flexibility to change the use of the funding for other activities.

Q2250 **Chair:** A social impact assessment would not be classed as research under the £2 million that was given to you?

Sasha Morgan: No, it would not be classed as research.

Dame Martina Milburn: We have spent £1 million. We commissioned 11 pieces of research and we are just about to look at what we want to do for the second £1 million.

Q2251 **Lucy Powell:** Before I start, can I just say that I slightly took a breath in there when you said that the Opposition were disappointed that social mobility has not got worse. I do not think there is a single member of the Opposition parties in this place or anywhere who would want to see social mobility or social justice getting worse. We all want to see it getting better, so I do not know where you have got that assertion from. Whether you thought that was a good line or not, but I would not use it again because it is not true and it is not the sort of thing I would want to hear you saying.

Dame Martina Milburn: You obviously have different conversations to me then. I was put under quite a lot of pressure and people wanted to raise questions about "Tory austerity has made social mobility worse", and because our headline was that it had stagnated they were not able to do that. That is what I meant by that comment.

Q2252 **James Frith:** Standing still is itself a failure.

Dame Martina Milburn: I completely agree. I am not justifying it.

James Frith: You could argue, therefore, that it has gone back. I think the point that Lucy has made—

Q2253 **Lucy Powell:** The way you phrased it was there was disappointment that it had not got worse. No, there would never be disappointment that it had not got worse. That is different from having an argument about the



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evidence base about whether it has or has not got worse. That is a completely different thing. Desiring it to be worse is different. Anyway, let's leave that there.

Just picking up from what Robert was saying, I could not believe it was a year ago that we had the pre-appointment hearing. I have to say, I think we were all quite sceptical ahead of that hearing and you impressed us more than we thought you might at that hearing and we agreed to your appointment. However, we are now a year on. You have had a lot of money to spend. What has your impact been in that year, do you think?

Dame Martina Milburn: I think the first was appointing the commissioners.

Q2254 **Lucy Powell:** No, impact. I don't mean input. I mean impact, output and outcomes.

Dame Martina Milburn: I do not think there has been a lot of impact in the first year. We had to restart with a whole new commission because there was nothing in place. We have appointed the commissioners. We appointed Sasha in February. We have a team of seven at the Secretariat and I think we are at the point now where, once we have published our strategy and commissioned the research, we want to start seeing the impact coming through but I think the—

Q2255 **Lucy Powell:** What would be your impact for the next year, do you think?

Dame Martina Milburn: We want to see the recommendations being taken up that we have made in the "State of the Nation" report. That is what we want to see.

Q2256 **Lucy Powell:** Such as?

Dame Martina Milburn: Such as the student premium and the increase in funding for FE. That would certainly be near the top of the list for all the commissioners.

Q2257 **Lucy Powell:** What are you doing to do that?

Dame Martina Milburn: We are writing to all the Permanent Secretaries to say, "These are the recommendations for your Department", and we are writing to the chairs of the relevant Select Committees—so obviously a list will be coming to Robert—and we are going to monitor what the Departments then do about it.

Q2258 **Lucy Powell:** Do you think that in itself will be sufficient? Obviously the report came out in April. We are now mid-June. I am not sure how long it takes to write a letter but that feels like—

Dame Martina Milburn: The report came out on 30 April, so—

Lucy Powell: I probably would have sent the letter the same day if it had been me.



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Sammy Wright: The key thing to understand is, as a commission, what we have done over the last six months is we have tried to establish a way of working between 12 disparate people from very different backgrounds and very different areas of work. What we have tried to do is, rather than simply following the normal channels of Civil Service governmental advice, think very coherently about how we will actually get movement. We do not simply want to be writing a letter and it drop into a void. We want to be landing these things very, very effectively, and that does take time for us to—

Q2259 **Lucy Powell:** Sure. As we discussed when you were here last time, Martina, I probably take a slightly different tack in terms of the range of commissioners and so on, in the sense that for me this should not be about, “How do we bring together a disparate group of people and work out what we are supposed to be doing?” This is about, “We are spending a lot of public money. How do we make an impact right now?”

If we are people that do not understand how we make impacts, maybe we are not the right commissioners. It is not a case of, “Oh, well, I have done this groovy thing in Bolton” necessarily. It is, “How do I change the outcomes for people right now in this country on social mobility?” Do you think you are able to do that because it does not feel like you really are?

Sasha Morgan: The other thing is to think about the timeframe in which you are thinking about impact. It is something that the Commission has thought about a lot when we did the research. As you will know the issue of social mobility manifests throughout a lifetime. It is not things that manifest at the end in terms of outcome in one year. If you look back at the database that we have on social mobility, it does not shift in a single year.

James Frith: Sasha, you—

Sasha Morgan: I will definitely respond. Let me just finish the point, which is one of the things we are looking at are the outcome measures that happen over a longer period of time. The conversation often gets conflated back to: what is either the activity or what are the measures that have happened in 12 months, 18 months or 24 months? Lots of the issues around social mobility are chronic. They are generational.

What we know particularly, if you look at the work on living standards, if you look at the impact, they turn up at different points in the lifecycle. Many of the interventions that we are doing now will show up in 20 years, so part of that is having a useful outcomes framework that works on a long enough timetable. One of the things we are asking for the support of parliamentarians on is to make sure that the conversations do not always end up in a very short term way.

Q2260 **Lucy Powell:** I would fully agree with that. I am not saying I want you to turn around the outcomes for people within a year. No, that is a different thing. I am talking about the impact of turning around the whole system to do that.



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I am a member of the Education Select Committee. I am an MP. I follow these things closely. There is only one thing that I can remember you having actually done in the last year, which was to produce the report. That should not be the impact I feel as someone who is shaping policy in this space. Do you know what I mean? That is the point I am making.

We all know these things are longitudinal. We just had two really significant reports in the last week on the outcomes of Sure Start centres, for example, and the long-term benefits they have. It is how we are shaping that long-term with what is a large amount of money. What I am worried about, I think, is the sense that this is somehow the year dot for you.

The Social Mobility Commission has been in existence for, what, nine years or so? There is a lot of data there. There is a huge amount of data already out there. We know what needs to be done in large part. It is a case of doing it, so are you trying to do too much? Are you looking all over? Do you feel that you are all so inexperienced that this is somehow year dot for you? What is the issue?

Dame Martina Milburn: I think we don't, but what we are very conscious of is we want to make the right impact. What we are not is a kind of rent-a-quote. What the commissioners have all done individually has been hosting different things all around the country. We have done quite a lot of work outside of London.

Q2261 **Lucy Powell:** To what end, though?

Dame Martina Milburn: Sammy, for example, has pulled together the schools in—well, you can talk about it.

Sammy Wright: I suppose what I would start with is I understand what you are saying but the point I would come to is: as the Commission is constituent of people who are there doing one day a month over six months, it feels like it has been a hugely intense six months filled with lots of impact and thought, but I would absolutely agree that I think it is the next 12 months where you are going to see far more of the output of that. In terms of what I have personally been doing, and this is my perspective—

Q2262 **Lucy Powell:** Do not get me wrong, I am not criticising the commissioners. You are a teacher. It would be like us as a sort of Select Committee saying, "Do you know what, we are going to solve everything about teaching. We are going to spend the next year spending one day a week going into a classroom and after two years we are going to get not even to NQT level", and you are sitting there as a head teacher going, "We could have told you that. What are you spending all that time doing that for?" Do you know what I mean? I am not criticising your endeavour or your commitment or your motive. What I am saying is: this is a lot of public money for a body that has been in existence for many years that is somehow just getting its act together and bringing people together and having nice chats.



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Sammy Wright: I would not accept that description of what we are doing here. What we are doing is we have various statutory duties, which we have been fulfilling, such as the writing of the report that I do feel represents a pretty comprehensive use of new data providing new answers in this space. I think that is really important. The amount of research and effort that has gone into that should not be minimised. It is a very significant document.

Q2263 **Lucy Powell:** The "State of the Nation" reports are always a good thing to watch out for in the year but that is not the only—

Sammy Wright: No, but what I would say is, in terms of what you have said about the Commission having been in existence for a little bit longer, that is where you get something like the "State of the Nation" report or the research we have done, a business toolkit. That is stuff that has lagged from before and was started and has been continued. That is the ongoing process of the Commission.

Whereas there is a separate aspect to what we are doing, which is, yes, year dot, we are trying to do things differently from the last commission as well. Because, frankly, let's be honest, the last Commission there were many useful things that came out of it but it is not like suddenly social mobility has ticked massively up.

Lucy Powell: No, for sure.

Sammy Wright: I think we do need to think about doing things differently and I do think it is really important to recognise that we do have the expertise. We have the Secretariat that is living and breathing this stuff and it has access to the wider research. We have members of our commission, such as Sam Friedman—

Q2264 **Lucy Powell:** Sure. There are lots of other people who want to come in. This is a conversation, Martina, and I and the Committee had a year ago, which is about being focused on what the impact is rather than a thousand flowers bloom. I just go back to that, because the point that the Chair has made very well is that there are lots of very nimble organisations out there producing high quality research on a fraction of the budget.

For example, a couple of weeks ago we had the Northern Powerhouse commission in here. It has done a really good piece of work with the Education Datalab on the pupils who are getting free school meals their whole career and the massive attainment gap for those, which is much greater than the usual way we measure attainment gaps, a piece of research that did not cost them very much money that could have huge impacts on the way we think about how we allocate resources. So I would just say to you: could you please just be a lot more focused on impact, on making policy change that will change the outcomes that you want and not on the kind of woolly nice stuff?



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Dame Martina Milburn: We are agreeing with you. We haven't published any of the research yet and, you are right, individually the pieces do not cost that much. It is when you pull it all together. The actual cost of running the Secretariat I think is about £600,000.

Q2265 **Chair:** In answer to my question you were saying that you do not have much engagement with Ministers, so what impact are you having other than publishing a really worthy report? I am not clear what your USP is.

Dame Martina Milburn: We published the social mobility barometer. Then we published the skills report. Then we published the "State of the Nation" report, all of which, as Sammy said, was all stuff that was in the pipeline, which we had to get out very quickly.

Q2266 **Chair:** How many of these reports have the Government said they would implement—all of them?

Sasha Morgan: That is the process that it is undergoing now. The process that came in once we published at the end of May. It is the beginning of the landing session. I have worked on a number of commissions before and it isn't typical that within a month you have landed all of your recommendations. These processes take a while. There are peer to peer conversations happening at working level, so it is not simply the meetings that you have directly with Ministers.

Q2267 **Chair:** For example, your skills report, what have the Government said about that?

Dame Martina Milburn: I do not think the Government have said anything about it.

Q2268 **Chair:** Exactly. When we publish a report the Government respond and they say which recommendations they like, which recommendations they do not like, which recommendations they might have a look at implementing. When was that published again, just remind us?

Sasha Morgan: That was published towards the beginning of the year.

Q2269 **Chair:** Right. It is now the end of June and you have published, spent money and time doing a very important report on skills, which was a good report but as yet the impact has been zero, so what is the point?

Dame Martina Milburn: We didn't. The previous commission had already done that.

Q2270 **Lucy Powell:** Is it not your job to be banging the door down of the Secretary of State or the Ministers on a weekly basis.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes.

Lucy Powell: You do not even know what they are saying about it.

Dame Martina Milburn: That is my point: not on a weekly basis.

Lucy Powell: On any basis.



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Dame Martina Milburn: You cannot do it because you have commissioners who are one day a month.

Q2271 **Chair:** How many meetings have you had with Damian Hinds or with the relevant Ministers in the past six months?

Dame Martina Milburn: I have had one meeting with Damian and two or three phone calls.

Q2272 **Chair:** How many meetings with Ministers or is that it?

Dame Martina Milburn: That is it.

Q2273 **Lucy Allan:** Good morning. This is an accountability hearing and it is about scrutiny and you will have expected robust challenge when you came in the door.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, sure.

Q2274 **Lucy Allan:** That is what we are giving you and it is intended to be helpful and constructive, to make sure the Social Mobility Commission is the best that it can be. I fully accept that the predecessor organisation had exactly the same challenges with Government, so it is not unique and it is great that we can air that you have had trouble accessing Government participation in the work that you are doing, so that is a very important outcome this morning.

I am going to move on to a few specifics. I want to ask about improving public understanding and public perception of the Social Mobility Commission. I think that was one of the things you said at the pre-appointment hearing that you felt needed improvement, and I wonder how you are going about that in terms of enhancing public perception and awareness.

Dame Martina Milburn: When we have the strategy set, which should be done certainly by the end of the summer, probably by mid-summer, we then have a full day on communications and we have a whole range of characters lined up to come and advise us. Then we basically get on with it.

One of the points of having Farrah on the Commission is because of her expertise in communications and publishing. Meanwhile, the younger commissioners have been making social media blogs and things and taking those up. As I say, we did not get on to explaining what Sammy had done in the north-east. The commissioners have all personally been doing stuff: seminars, talks and so on around as well. Next to the strategy we will have a full comms plan of how we are going to take this out.

Q2275 **Lucy Allan:** One of the other things that you mentioned in the pre-appointment hearing was the three mini taskforce with overarching themes. Do those exist?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes.

Q2276 **Lucy Allan:** How are they progressing and what are those themes?

Dame Martina Milburn: We have divided them up along the lines of the “State of the Nation”, so we have early years in schools, FE, HE, apprenticeships and working lives. Those are the three taskforces and various commissioners that sit on several of those taskforces. We also acknowledge that there are overlaps, so apprenticeships could go in schools. It could go in the FE space. It could go in working lives, so some of those commissioners have come to different briefing sessions as well.

Q2277 **Lucy Allan:** One other point that you did also make in the pre-appointment hearing was around the quarterly reports. I know we have touched on engagement with the Secretary of State and so on, but have quarterly reports become part of your bread and butter now or not yet?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes. They are published on the website. The minutes of our meetings are published on the website. We know people read them because we have had some responses from the public so, yes, that is all done and happening.

Lucy Allan: Thank you. That is all I could ask.

Q2278 **Ian Mearns:** One of the key changes you wanted to make was to promote best practice. What practical steps have you taken to do that?

Dame Martina Milburn: That is in the research that we are publishing at the moment. The next phase of the research is going to specifically look at what is working and where can we promote that. As Sammy said earlier, one of the things we found is a lot of the data is missing. People think it works.

I had a very good session last week with all the chairs of the opportunity areas, but obviously they are still being evaluated. They are still looking at where they can join forces. Interestingly, they thought we added a lot of value and they were very keen to see us doing a lot more and bringing together a lot more of the players in the space than we are doing at the moment and they saw our role as vitally important. That is the kind of thing we are looking at.

One of the specific pieces that we are going to commission is whether there should be a What Works Centre for Further Education, which there isn’t at the moment. There are gaps. EEF, the Education Endowment Foundation—and Kevin and I have certainly met—has identified gaps where we can help promote what is working and what isn’t working. I do not know if you want to add anything to that, Sasha.

Sasha Morgan: The other thing that was quite interesting was, you asked at the appointment hearing about whether the Commission would get confused and think that it was a what works centre or not. I think we see our space as doing work in the amplification space.

I was talking to Elliott Major who is one of the founding partners of EEF. Later on in the autumn he is going to be publishing a book, which is the



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kind of greatest hits of. One of the things that they are finding is that a lot of the research where you find interventions that actually work the big question is: are they being taken up?

One of the things that we see as our role is doing extra amplification of the things that have the strongest evidence base and making sure that different partners and stakeholders are aware. It is very interesting that people that were in the foundation of some of these what works centres are recognising that, even though the body of work is there, actually connecting what the findings are off of millions and millions of pounds of research do not necessarily get taken up by the very audiences that you want them to, so we see that in terms of our promotion role as a key thing that we should be doing.

One of the interesting things you said earlier, Robert, was about whether the work that we do and the research can be done by absolutely anybody else. What was interesting is that in the years in which the Commission was dormant and absent, no one picked up the new labour force data that we went on to analyse. If the work was being done and anybody could do it, it would have been happening. It is interesting that in the hiatus, when the Commission was not around, that research did not happen. Anyone could have picked it up. It was available from ONS but no one did it.

Q2279 Chair: Let me just challenge you on that, it is good that you did that but the DfE could easily give a grant to an organisation and say, "Can you please do this?" or they could have asked a university to do it. I am not saying you should not do that. I very much wanted there to be a Social Justice Commission but I don't think that is a case for justifying your existence, if you see what I mean.

Sasha Morgan: No, I understand. I am simply saying that the type of consolidation work that we are doing isn't happening anywhere else, and what is interesting is that the parties that you name are the people that tell us that they find it useful.

Q2280 Ian Mearns: In terms of identifying and disseminating best practice, I think the answer that you have given in a nutshell is: at the moment, it is too early to identify particular examples of where you have actually identified best practice and it is now being put into place somewhere else.

You also said that you plan to make quarterly reports to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister. Have you done that so far?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes.

Q2281 Ian Mearns: You have actually published those quarterly reports?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes. We have done one, which is up online.

Q2282 Ian Mearns: You have also said that the framework document would be key to ensuring that the Social Mobility Commission has teeth. What does the framework document look like?



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Sasha Morgan: The framework document with the Department is being drafted at the moment by their strategy team. It is in negotiation and it will hopefully be completed by the end of the summer.

Q2283 **Ian Mearns:** In essence, the new Commission has been in place for six months but you do not yet have a framework document from which to work to?

Sasha Morgan: As you can see, some of the outputs we would have wanted from the framework document, things that were asked for, whether it be the number of commissions, speed of appointment, the nature of our research budget, have already been delivered without one. There is one thing about the kind of effectiveness. In the years that the Commission was here before, roughly speaking, the research budget was £100,000. We came in and we were able to do an early negotiation to get £2 million, which just came in in April, so the outcomes in line with the things that we wanted from the framework are already showing themselves. Yes, we still need to have a written document but the outcomes are already coming and are there.

Q2284 **Ian Mearns:** If the framework document itself has to be agreed with the DfE, with the Department, does that in some way call into question your autonomy?

Sasha Morgan: Not at all. It is quite standard that commissions negotiate framework documents directly with their Departments. That is completely standard.

Q2285 **Ian Mearns:** When the framework document is completed and agreed with the Department it will be published, I take it?

Sasha Morgan: Absolutely, yes.

Ian Mearns: Thank you very much.

Q2286 **Thelma Walker:** Good morning. Dame Martina, you have previously described yourself as an agitator. What would you do if the Government introduced legislation that, in the view of the Social Mobility Commission, has negative consequences for social mobility? What would be your response?

Dame Martina Milburn: We would say so and we would say so quite strongly and quite openly. Where I think it gets challenging, which is why the research is such an important one to have, is the data that backs that up. In this space, in particular, there is an awful lot of words and an awful lot of opinions but what we found when we went through the "State of the Nation" report was there are quite often gaps in evidence, so what could they come out with that would make social mobility significantly worse?

Q2287 **Thelma Walker:** I am thinking not about the data but more how you would react or respond, because my colleague Lucy talked about the impact of the Social Mobility Commission. I am more concerned about



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how you would react and respond. For instance, if I give you an example of just this week's "Action for Children" report that says there has been a 22% fall in the number of children using Sure Start centres in the 30 most deprived areas of England: 1.8 million is the estimated number of children using centres in England in 2017-18 against 2.2 million four years before.

What I am concerned about is that I did not hear anything from the Commission on that report, and I wonder, as a commission, what system you have in place for when a statement is made by a charity—like Action for Children—that is directly about impacting on vulnerable families. What do you have in place for an immediate, "This is what we think about this"? Where is your outcry, if you are saying you are an agitator? I would put it to you—if we are thinking about impact—that those statistics are so damning about what is happening to our most vulnerable families.

Dame Martina Milburn: Just on that we specifically highlighted the closure of children's centres in the "State of the Nation" report.

Q2288 **Thelma Walker:** In your response to that report, was there a voice from the Commission straightaway out there to the public?

Dame Martina Milburn: No.

Q2289 **Thelma Walker:** Well, I would put it to you that my view is that there should be.

Dame Martina Milburn: Do you think there is a danger if we are just there giving quotes on all the reports coming out—of which there are a lot—rather than basing it on what we see and coming out and saying, "Here is the data. This is what we say. Here is the evidence. This is why you have to change that"?

Q2290 **Thelma Walker:** Part of your role and responsibility, as chair of this Commission, is to hold the Government to account and in my view this is part of it.

The other example I would like to give is when the report came out from Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur, who told us that the UK Government were in a state of denial about the impact of austerity policies on the poor, "British compassion for those who are suffering has been replaced by a punitive, mean-spirited and often callous approach. Changes to taxes and benefits have taken the highest toll on those least able to bear it". Where was the voice of the Commission with that report?

Dame Martina Milburn: As I say, at the moment we have taken—

Q2291 **Thelma Walker:** No. I want to know: what was the immediate response from the Social Mobility Commission to that damning report?

Dame Martina Milburn: We did not respond.

Q2292 **Thelma Walker:** Why?



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Dame Martina Milburn: We have taken a view at the moment that we want to get our strategy sorted. We want to understand what our comms are and I am not sure that just commenting endlessly on reports that come out—

Q2293 **Thelma Walker:** All corners of society responded and reacted to that report and our own Social Mobility Commission did not.

Dame Martina Milburn: No. Well, I take that point actually. That is a fair criticism.

Q2294 **Chair:** What is your strategy? You said you have been working out what your strategy is. What is your strategy?

Dame Martina Milburn: We are working on it at the moment, so the commissioners have a full day meeting on it in July and a final one in the summer.

Q2295 **Chair:** That is quite a long time since you have been in and your commissioners have been in. It is now half way through the year.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, it is. The Commission meets once a month and we had to get out the “State of the Nation” report. We had to commission £1 million of research, which wasn’t an easy task to do and we had the other two reports to get out, so in a normal world you would have started, you would have set your strategy, you would have started delivering it and then you would have got on. We did not have that luxury because of all the stuff that was in the pipeline before. As a commission, we felt it would be very irresponsible for us to publish the “State of the Nation” report if the commissioners had not spent hours and hours and hours going through every chapter and line and being comfortable with it.

Q2296 **Chair:** You could at least give us an indication of what your strategy is. You must have some idea that you are happy to share with the Committee that is responsible for overseeing the work that you do.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes.

Sammy Wright: What I would say is that, in terms of the discussions that we have had, one of the key points that we have come up with is clearly you guys have all said about holding Ministers to account and that kind of engagement with Ministers. We have been discussing at length how we can land our recommendations. How we can engage with Ministers. We have some ideas of how we are going to go about that, but again it is really important that we get it right and we do it in the right way.

Q2297 **Lucy Powell:** Can I just suggest just briefly—sorry, I know Thelma is in the middle of asking her questions—that maybe the role of the Commission isn’t to do a line by line committee doing a report. Do you know what I mean? Maybe that isn’t how you make impact, if I am honest. Maybe you should look at the roles and what are the terms of reference of each part of your organisation. I would not say that having



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12 commissioners from all over the country, with lots of different backgrounds, who meet once a month that their job is to do a line by line edit of an annual report.

Sammy Wright: Can I say it wasn't necessarily line by line edits. The nature of it was trying to challenge and interrogate the content of the report.

Lucy Powell: Well, strategic direction.

Sammy Wright: Yes.

Chair: I will come back to strategy again. Thelma.

Q2298 **Thelma Walker:** Yes. A short question about transparency and what you are doing to make the Social Mobility Commission as transparent as possible. I noticed that the board meeting minutes were published just yesterday but do you plan to publish a list of the current commissioners' declarations of interest?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, of course we can.

Q2299 **Thelma Walker:** Why have they not been forthcoming so far?

Dame Martina Milburn: I don't know.

Sasha Morgan: In terms of declarations of interest, from my understanding, there is no specific requirement for them for this type of commission but we are perfectly happy—

Q2300 **Thelma Walker:** But if we are being fully open and transparent.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, that is fine.

Sasha Morgan: There is a whole spectrum of things that one could do in transparency from which we can choose. That is one. There are numbers of other things that are possible. We have chosen what we have put up so far. It is possible to put things on declarations of interest.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, we can do that.

Q2301 **James Frith:** Just on the question of the UN report, do you recognise the assessment that the UN report made and its conclusions?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, I do actually. I thought in particular the suggestion about the review of Universal Credit, stopping the five weeks, looking at the Department for Transport. They are all things that we have on our radar already, so yes I do recognise it.

Chair: James, you are next.

Q2302 **James Frith:** I will gladly step up to the plate, Chair. That was a nice little palate cleanser. Good morning. I am quite torn because I thought your report was really good but I thought it was a really crass comment on what you said about the Opposition. I am trying to get beyond that, if I am honest, because I just do not think that sets any sort of positive



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intent of constructive dialogue early on. You appeared to double down on it when Lucy gave you the chance to qualify.

Aside from that, as a commission, help me to understand do you have the freedom to commission activity in doing not just research? Could you be an enabling pilot setting up operations where you are spending money on immediate impact as opposed to research? Is that within your remit?

Dame Martina Milburn: Not at the moment.

Q2303 **James Frith:** Would you like it to be in your remit?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, very much.

Q2304 **James Frith:** What would you do first if that were in your remit?

Dame Martina Milburn: I think the first thing we would do, from my point of view—obviously, I have 12 commissioners that I have not spoken to about this—I would go for the FE space looking at what can really work in FE. The other bit that came out of the conversation with the chairs of the opportunity areas, is the difficulty that parts of the country, which I know you all know very well, have across the board at attracting good talent, so attracting good head teachers and staff to the schools, attracting good talent to the local FE college. The one thing they all said unanimously is it is so challenging when you are trying to employ directors of children's services.

You have a whole thing going on across an area that leads to that kind of downward spiral, and I think there are some things that the Social Mobility Commission could do in that space.

Q2305 **James Frith:** Yes, I quite agree with you. I think Sasha talked very eloquently about the gaps in research. I take that on board. I think gaps in practice and gaps in method is where we are going to see the best impact. I am sceptical of an organisation that defends its first year in operation by simply saying you have commissioned research, because that is outsourcing other people to do some work for you as opposed to what I think is inaction. I am sure it is about balance. You need some evidence.

For example, I absolutely commend the FE. I think that is absolutely the right place to start. One of the biggest problems is that FE, without any additional funding, inherits students that do not have their Maths GCSE. Therefore, why isn't the Social Mobility Commission commissioning a pilot with some of the money instead of research? You are paying for additional capacity in an FE college to ensure those students get their Maths GCSE without an additional burden. That would be a social mobility action within year one you could say, "We have ensured across regions 150 more students have their Maths GCSE because of the Commission".

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, I agree. That would be great.

Q2306 **James Frith:** Well, great, let's come up with another list. That is just within a minute. That is not a year.



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Dame Martina Milburn: We are not allowed to do that at the moment.

Q2307 **James Frith:** No, great, well, let's strong arm it. The Children's Commissioner has met five times in three months with Damian Hinds. Perhaps because Damian Hinds is her landlord.

Dame Martina Milburn: No, just on that point, the Children's Commissioner is full-time. There is a big difference.

James Frith: Sure. That is fair.

Dame Martina Milburn: The Children's Commissioner is full-time and she has a staff of 18. The Social Mobility Commission: I am three days a month and the commissioners are one day a month with a staff of seven so—

Q2308 **James Frith:** It is not about you. I think Lucy made the point as well. I am not expecting and I do not think the Commission should try to boil the ocean. You should be fire starters.

Dame Martina Milburn: Exactly.

Q2309 **James Frith:** You should be setting up and enabling and instigating and empowering and identifying, through research of course, but there is plenty out there. We do not need early years' research to know the impact of Sure Start centres. We do not need the Commission to do research on FE to know that FE is the Cinderella service. You read any number of reports, both from the previous Education Committee and the most recent one.

I would like to see some more impatience. Your agitation brand word, great, but let's get impatient about the impact that you can make because with that level of funding small businesses are having impact within a day, social enterprises, charities, within a day. The NHS would not be allowed to spend the money you have spent without delivering some level of impact. I would just encourage you to wean off—the Government do this all the time—this idea that something is complex, therefore, we will observe it rather than intervene. I think we need more intervention.

Sammy Wright: On the note of the research and the recommendations, it is really important to understand what we are saying. We are commissioning research on areas where there are gaps and we don't have evidence but, you are absolutely right, we do not need evidence for the FE, so we are simply recommending directly that funding should be equalised between 16 and 19 and 11 and 16 and, also, that we should have a student probing in 16 to 19. It is a very direct recommendation and, yes, we will be agitating for that and we will be doing that—

Q2310 **James Frith:** I would gladly support—as a free agent but I am sure colleagues would join in—an endeavour that says, "Following our recommendations we now want to pilot the following" because otherwise, look, recommendations just go into the ether. We are absolutely alive



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with recommendations all over the place. We currently do not have anyone with power running the country. The corporate spending review may not happen. We may have an emergency Budget. Brexit uncertainty, but you do not, therefore, forfeit getting things done in the meantime. There is always going to be reasons for new research or gaps in evidence, but it is actually, well, what can we do? There is plenty that can be done already with that intervention.

Sasha Morgan: There have been a number of mentions of the large amounts of money. The money arrived on 1 April and it was given with very specific caveats: that it could be used solely for research. We cannot take the money and do anything we wish with it. If the message that you want is that the Commission is unrestricted on its use of funding that is something very specific, but to talk about the fact that the Commission has either had a large amount of money for a long period of time would be inaccurate.

The Commission had £100,000; the remainder of the £100,000 when Martina came into post and then negotiated the additional money to look at research gaps, so yes it is interesting to think about the different things that could be done if we had unrestricted funds but we are not a start up business and we do not have unrestricted funds with which to do whatever we want.

Q2311 **James Frith:** I am not suggesting that you have unrestricted funds. I think mobility for the Social Mobility Commission would be a good start, though. You should be able to be more than simply pointing at things saying, "Less of that, more of that, trouble with this".

Sammy Wright: Many of the commissioners would absolutely agree with you. This is what we are talking about in our strategy meetings. We spend a lot of time sitting round saying, "How can we actually achieve things? We want to be a commission that does things", like we are there—

Q2312 **James Frith:** We hear what you said there, "We spend a lot of time sitting around thinking about how we can achieve things". I get that but I would just challenge that with that incredible talent on your board, brilliant talent on your board, one day a week—

Dame Martina Milburn: A month.

James Frith: Sorry, one day a month, 12 of them and a full-time Secretariat and a—

Dame Martina Milburn: Full-time Secretariat of seven.

Q2313 **James Frith:** I do not know what the man hours total for that is but you could achieve quite a bit. It is not about every one doing, "Oh, we will wait until we are next together to look through the report line by line".

Sammy Wright: Can I clarify that that really isn't the case of what is happening. When I say we have spent a lot of time, our own time. I don't



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mean board meetings. I mean when we meet up of an evening to sit around and try to think of strategy in our own time. Personally, I do a day a month. I am a school teacher. It is very hard for me to get out of school and yet I am doing today.

On Thursday I will be meeting with the National Citizenship Service. On Monday I will be meeting with Opportunity North East. I am spending a very large amount of my time—wherever I can do it—to do this. At the same time, we are at the point where we are just gearing up for the impact and what I would say to you is we want the impact absolutely.

Q2314 James Frith: As an MP on this Committee, I commit to helping you get some authority to commission pilots or enable activity following recommendation and I hope you would take us up on that.

Just finally on the issue of working in isolation would be a mistake, as you said, Martina, and I agree with, which Departments give you the best response, or are most responsive I should say, and who do you struggle with?

Dame Martina Milburn: That is a good question. I think a Department that we have not tackled yet so I do not know what their response will be, and where I completely agreed with Professor Alston and his comments, is transport. One of the good things that Jess, Harvey and Saeed are able to do on the commission is remind us what is like. Jess ended up not staying at her FE college because she had to get three buses from where she lived in Norfolk, and you hear this time and time again. I think transport is quite critical.

One of the pieces of research we want to commission in the next six months—just so everybody understands, we were given the money on 1 April and we have to have it all spent by 31 March. The first million was not just frivolously spent. It took time to understand what we wanted to do, to go out to tender, to get the tenders back and to understand the tenders. That is the kind of thing we have been doing. One of the pieces going forward is around the links between social mobility and health, mental health and physical health. It is those kinds of gaps that talking to the people in this space are saying, “If we had some evidence to support that would be really helpful”. That is where we are at the moment.

If we could have less restrictions on how we spend the money that would be great.

Q2315 James Frith: Final question, Chair. Would you welcome setting in train a priority for a year or three years so that your Social Mobility Commission focus becomes further education for a period of time?

Chair: Just a brief answer.

Dame Martina Milburn: That is one of the things we have looked at. We have not made a decision on that yet but we want to look much further,



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we want to look 20 years and 30 years because we think part of the issue in this space is it is all too short term.

Q2316 Ian Mearns: You said you have met with the leaders of the Opportunity Areas and Sammy has mentioned the Opportunity Fund North East, which we complained bitterly about not existing for quite some time in this Committee. Will Opportunity North East be included in the meeting with the Opportunity Fund Areas?

Dame Martina Milburn: I do not think so. It was only the second time that all the chairs had met and I joined their regular meeting. I do not remember them being there.

Q2317 Ian Mearns: From my perspective, I know that they are hybrid in terms of the Opportunity Fund for the North East, it is not like an Opportunity Area but it is, if you know what I mean. Can we make sure that they are included? It would be a shame if they were excluded from the process of actually trying to pull all of these together and having some co-ordination around the country.

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, it was not our meeting. It was their meeting that I attended. It is a good point and why don't I send you a list of who was there?

Q2318 Ian Mearns: As the Chair of the Social Mobility Commission you should refuse to meet them without Opportunity North East being there.

Dame Martina Milburn: They might have been. It might be my memory. I will send you a list of everybody who was at the meeting.

Ian Mearns: That would be great.

Chair: You will find that Ian is a one-man band in Opportunity North East for the whole country.

Lucy Powell: He is a model of how to make impact.

Q2319 Emma Hardy: Good morning, just for the record, as an Opposition MP, I do not want to see social mobility get worse. I think one of the things that we do not talk about when we discuss social mobility and social justice is the fact that, when the professional class is not growing, for social mobility to exist some people have to move down the social mobility ladder. We do not tend to talk about that, which is why I encourage us talking about social justice instead because that enables everybody to move up together rather than actually enabling some to move down.

On that point, I would like to talk a little bit about higher education and the "State of the Nation" report. Whereas there is part of me that accepts, Dame Martina, what you said about children being forced down an academic route that does not suit them, do you share my concerns that, when we talk about children not being forced down an academic route that does not suit them, what we are actually talking about is disadvantaged children? I do not see an awful lot of middle class parents



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saying, "I don't want my child forced down an academic route that doesn't suit them".

Dame Martina Milburn: I think partly. Obviously, with my Prince's Trust hat on, we work with a very wide range of young people. What we are seeing increasingly is the real pressures on all young people and the increased amount of mental health and things like that. I think it does affect some middle classes but what we are concerned about is really disadvantaged young people. If you read our skills report earlier in the year, it said that the generation least likely to value apprenticeships were young people themselves. Part of the problem is—Sammy will know more than me as a teacher—the way the focus is in schools and the push towards degrees, whether they are the right degree for the young person or not. Sammy, I do not know if you want to add to that?

Sammy Wright: To me this ties into exactly what you said about social justice and social mobility. I speak as someone who works a lot with local universities, Durham, Newcastle and also with Oxford in order to promote higher education uptake in the north-east. I am fully behind it. At the same time, I recognise that the discourse around the value of higher education runs the risk of saying, "Okay, so here is the world and there are the haves that get into higher education and the have nots who do not".

In terms of that idea of social justice, of actually trying to have equality in our society and opportunity for all, what we need to do is value both routes and find the right routes for the right person rather than simply saying the way to get on is to go through higher education.

Q2320 **Emma Hardy:** I completely accept that. What are you doing as a Commission in terms of giving greater value to the other routes, as Sammy has just said?

Sammy Wright: That is where a lot of our focus on FE is really important and also where we are looking at trying to engage a lot with the apprenticeship sector. We are concerned about the take up of apprenticeships among the disadvantaged. We are concerned sometimes about the entry requirement not being appropriate for the nature of the apprenticeship. There are various different things we are looking at there, but I think very much that is where the Commission's makeup and the fact that we have people that are directly involved in the business community and the business world do help us in looking at apprenticeship routes and direct routes into the world of work.

Dame Martina Milburn: We have a toolkit for employers coming out later in the year. It was initially scheduled by the previous commission but when we looked at it was very much on one type of industry, so KPMG, those kinds of professions, which in our head is not a toolkit for employers. That is for a particular type. We have broadened it and we are doing quite a lot of work on it over the summer so that, when it does come out, it is something very practical that employers can use.



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For example, I spoke to a company that takes in carpentry apprentices, they were losing most of them after 18 months and what they did is they realised there was a sudden hike in the academic bit of the apprenticeship at 18 months, so they brought in a tutor to help them and their retention rates have really increased.

It is those kinds of practical things that we want to have in the report that say to an employer, big or small, "This is what you can do". We also know from our skills report that the majority of apprentices are going to people over 25. There are increasingly less numbers of young people taking up apprenticeships—I cannot speak this morning—so that is one thing we see is quite urgent to address and to look at.

Q2321 Emma Hardy: In the "State of the Nation" report you mentioned about the dropout rate for disadvantaged students being so high—

Dame Martina Milburn: At university?

Q2322 Emma Hardy: Yes, at university. What can the Commission do to address this in terms of conversations with the universities? Are you having conversations with the universities about this?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, in fact Sasha goes back and helps her previous university about keeping disadvantaged young people there. Again, we have started those conversations.

To your point, I am expecting to see the impact in 12 months' time because there is a lot of stuff that they could do that they do not do, right down to things like making it much easier for young people to get the financial bursaries on offer. One of the things we called for in report was for universities to have a sort of UCAS-type system and publish that upfront so that a young person knows what is available, what financial support they can get.

One of the biggest issues we are seeing in FE with the cuts is the things that are being cut are career services and support for mental health, the kind of extra curricula. Again, in the report we have called for that to be urgently addressed.

In terms of the "State of the Nation", what we did differently and why we did debate them long and hard is we reduced the amount of recommendations in the report. What we tried to come up with was very practical targeted things.

Q2323 Emma Hardy: How many of those have been adopted?

Dame Martina Milburn: We do not know yet. That is the point of now trying to monitor the Departments.

Q2324 Emma Hardy: You mentioned that Sasha goes to her previous university and talks to them about supporting disadvantaged students, so what have they done practically that has changed to support these students?



Sasha Morgan: They probably do not want to focus on the single thing that I do, but thinking systematically about how our lead for HE is talking with the various different university groupings about what they are doing, about access at scale rather than simply—

Q2325 **Emma Hardy:** I am after an example of something that they are doing differently.

Sammy Wright: Can I give an example in terms of what we have been looking at in the north-east as a result of the Commission's roundtable that we hosted in February? We have been in discussions with Durham, Newcastle and Oxford about looking at the way outreach is done and about how we can support better the transition from school to university. There is a lot more stuff where we are looking to try to work with schools to develop the skills—particularly in disadvantaged students—so that they can transition a lot easier and they are not taken by surprise by the actual nature of university work and monitoring that transition both before and afterwards.

It is a project that is in its infancy there but we have been working with Opportunity North-East as well because it is one of their key indicators.

Q2326 **Emma Hardy:** Are you having conversations with the FE Minister about this, with Anne Milton about this?

Dame Martina Milburn: We will be, yes.

Q2327 **Emma Hardy:** But you have not yet about the work?

Dame Martina Milburn: No, we have not yet.

Q2328 **Emma Hardy:** Just as a final question, you were talking about the data on social mobility, do you also record and collect the data on the number of children who will not do as well as their parents did?

Sasha Morgan: Social mobility is the measurement; by its nature the data talks about the outcomes. It is a global analysis. Social mobility is about the relationship between an individual and their parents' outcome so it both records those who are doing better and those who are doing worse.

Q2329 **Emma Hardy:** Sorry, going back to your definition at the very beginning, you said in a summary, social mobility, "Are children doing better than their parents?" It was the definition that you gave. I am just asking: do you also look at the reverse of that?

Sasha Morgan: The official definition, if we look at the report, is the relationship between a person and their parents' outcome, so that is both up and down. Mostly politicians talk about and are most interested in upward mobility but, as you talked about downward mobility, yes, and you can see it in the stats at chapter 1, which looks at what the downward mobility likelihoods are, how they split by gender, by ethnicity, by other kind of backgrounds.



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It is the reason why, particularly in line with your first point, we are the first commission to actually commission a large study on downward mobility to look at how opportunity hoarding works, to look at how where we have people from more affluent backgrounds holding the space that means that the up and down cannot work, which is something that some people find uninteresting because they are saying, "Are you not having a rigorous focus just at the bottom?" Social mobility is both directions and unless you look at the dynamics in both directions you do not have the whole of the question.

We know it is not necessarily as popular but that is one of the biggest things that we are doing in terms of the research and the things we are looking at.

Chair: We have to move on. Have you finished, Emma?

Q2330 **Emma Hardy:** No, I just want to add, just as a quick follow up to that one, because it is an area I am very interested in myself, what recommendations are you making around the downward mobility?

Sasha Morgan: We have literally just commissioned the research so as soon as we have the recommendations we will share them.

Q2331 **Lucy Powell:** There is already a big piece of research on that, the sticky ceilings.

Sasha Morgan: There are different types of research. There is some in the US. We are looking for something particularly with a UK focus.

Q2332 **Lucy Powell:** No, UK, I have been to big seminars on it.

Sasha Morgan: That has not covered everything so we are doing something comprehensive in the space that will be interesting.

Q2333 **Ben Bradley:** I have been listening intently to all of that. I am not convinced we have yet got to the answer that several people are seeking. A comment first and foremost, you talked about the planning framework and what you want to do going forward and you said, Sasha, without a planning framework you still managed to achieve some outcomes and you cited getting £2 million for research as an outcome. Personally, I do not think a 2,000% increase in cost is an outcome. It is really important that you get that framework in place so you can tell us what we have all seeking, which is what is it you are aiming to do?

We are in a position in Government where in six weeks' time we are going to have a new Government led by a new person with new ideas. They are going to be sitting down in the DfE and in other Departments and saying, "How do you get the best value for money in these services?" We know things like FE do not have the funding that they need. I am interested in what your pitch is when this new Prime Minister sits down and says, "Why do not just put the money from all these commissioners and quasi-governmental bodies into FE and fund it properly?" Isn't that a better route to social mobility, to fund public services rather than adding



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layer after layer of bodies that can talk about things and publicise things and not do things? I am interested in what your pitch is to this new Prime Minister.

Sammy Wright: I would just say one side note to that is obviously that, yes, we are talking about a significant amount that is going into research there but at the same time in my school our annual budget is £12 million, so the whole Commission would do a sixth of my school.

Q2334 **Ben Bradley:** The point of the question is: I have not yet, from this discussion, figured out what it is you are trying to do. If a Prime Minister sits down with you in six weeks and says, "Right, I am thinking of putting all this funding into early years and into local government and into FE, because I think that is a better use in terms of supporting social mobility" what is your pitch to him to say, "No, keep this Commission".

Dame Martina Milburn: First of all, you have to look at the amount of money that they will need. If a Prime Minister said, "I would take all this money and I would use this to make a significant difference to social mobility" and we could put it all together—the student premium, for example, if you did that, we costed it at roughly £160 million, our budget is £2.5 million. So if we could pull all the commissions together, get rid of every Government commission but in return we will give you the best FE system ever that will make a significant difference, I think everyone would say, "Thank God, go ahead and do it".

Ben Bradley: All right, I shall make that recommendation.

Q2335 **Marion Fellows:** You will forgive me, Chair, I am not immediately moving on. I want to just tease out a few things. I was very interested at the start that you look at Scotland and Wales—obviously more important to me, Scotland. In Scotland we have different—at the moment everything is not great in FE. I have personal experience. I was a lecturer in a number of FE colleges in Scotland. We do have one major difference and that is articulation between further education colleges straight into second or third years of degree courses and there are very strong links. From personal experience, I know that that really helps with social mobility. People who would never have thought of going to university do end up going either full or part-time after they have completed an FE course.

If you want to punt my idea from Scotland, please feel free because I think it really works. There are many other good ideas about closing gaps in Scotland. It is not great, it is not all fantastic, it is not all working but the "State of the Nation" report does mention some of the really good work. Would you be using that almost as a way of speaking to Ministers and saying, "Look, this is what is happening here"? In my experience of four years on this Committee a lot of time the Committee tends to look out and that is great but do not always look closely at what is happening close by in Scotland and Wales. Would you be more open to punting these ideas, if I can put it like that, to Ministers and to people in the DfE?



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Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, I do not think I know enough about the system in Scotland. I sat as a governor of an FE college in London but I have not in Scotland. We were struck by the improvement in social mobility in Scotland and Wales compared to England. England has gone down; the other two have gone up. One of the next things is to find out why and to look at what can then be translated.

As you know yourself, whenever you talk to people in England everyone throws their hands up in horror and says, "But it is the scale". Absolutely we are very keen to look at it. One of our commissioners is chair of a group of FE colleges.

Q2336 **Marion Fellows:** You did tell us, Dame Martina, at your pre-meeting before that the more friends you have the more you can do together. So I just want to ask you, who are the SMC's friends?

Dame Martina Milburn: I certainly think the EEF have been extremely supportive, Sutton Trust has been very supportive, the Children's Commissioner has been very supportive, the special advisers at No. 10 have been very keen to help and support. That is just off the top of my head. I do not know if you have any more?

Sasha Morgan: The Equality and Human Rights Commission have looked at the new youth fund. There have been quite a number of organisations that we have been either working alongside or in collaboration with. One of the big things that the commissioner has asked us to do was to make sure that none of the work that we were taking forward was overlapping with work of the people next to us and that we should be championing what they are putting out rather than trying to either replicate or do the same work ourselves. That has been a key part of working in partnership rather than in some form of competition.

Q2337 **Marion Fellows:** You are working with them, not taking on what they doing but trying to add value to it?

Dame Martina Milburn: Add value, exactly.

Q2338 **Marion Fellows:** That seems fair enough. Dame Martina, you have placed a high priority on getting the right group of commissioners. Sammy, you maybe want to close your ears here. Has it made a difference? Do you think you have got the right group and do you think the new commissioners have made a difference to work of the Commission?

Dame Martina Milburn: I do. I think we are incredibly lucky to have them. They are from a very wide cross-section and they all bring something quite different. The business commissioners, for example, the business toolkit, took that on, looked at it, said, "This is not fit for purpose, we need to do it differently" and that is what is now being done at the moment. The younger commissioners, as I said people like Jess and Saeed—Saeed is from a care background—have been adding value in terms of saying, "Yes, that all sounds good, but actually if you are a



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young unemployed person in Bolton, this is how it feels. You have no support network at all and your local college has told you there is supposed to be a discretionary bursary but there is no funding". That is the kind of thing that can be highlighted.

I think they are providing exceptional value.

Q2339 **Ian Mearns:** If you forgive me, Dame Martina, I asked you earlier on about the publication of the quarterly reports. Am I right in thinking that they were actually put on the website only yesterday?

Sasha Morgan: The last report was. There is one report that has been done that covers the first quarter of this year and I think there was a lot that was put up.

Dame Martina Milburn: We can get you the date that they went up.

Q2340 **Ian Mearns:** I would not have asked the question if we had not seen it and I understand that if it has been published on the Social Mobility Commission's website that it was within the last few days.

What has been the effect of paying commissioners? Has it had any effect?

Dame Martina Milburn: I do not think so. I have spoken quite a lot to the Public Appointments Committee because they were absolutely stunned at the number of applications we got and, secondly, at the diversity of the commissioners we were able to get. One of the issues that it has highlighted is there is not enough support for normal people to do public appointments. One of the things we have asked for is that there is somebody or a unit in DWP who can help commissioners who do not have their own personal accountants with all the things they need to look at. Nobody wants to get it wrong.

I also think—if you want younger people and you want younger people from more disadvantaged backgrounds—you have to pay them more, because for us older commissioners we have either jobs or personal resources. That means we can contribute quite a lot. The younger commissioners don't. One of them in particular, because of doing this role, is more disadvantaged financially than he was before he took it. He has had to think very carefully about whether he continues doing it.

We have asked if we can pay, in particular the younger commissioners, more because of that. There is an interesting conversation about genuinely getting diversity into our public appointments and, in particular, if you are going to have a series of meetings, and we do not have all of them but we have probably the bulk in London, it costs money to get here, it costs money to stay overnight and that is very difficult to do when you are on a tight budget.

Q2341 **Chair:** Just because of time, if we could just speed it up.



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Dame Martina Milburn: Sorry, I was just answering that. I am talking to Mr Dowden about it and about the whole experience of public appointments.

Q2342 **Ian Mearns:** In local government many, many years ago there used to be a loss of earnings allowance. It is not a difficult principle. You can just establish how much people are losing on a daily rate based on their own payslips as it were. You could pay a loss of earnings allowance plus appropriate expenses; it is not a particularly difficult thing to sort out as long as you can get agreement from the paymaster.

Dame Martina Milburn: If you want diversity in public appointments you have to look at doing it differently.

Q2343 **Ian Mearns:** As a Commission, how are you judging your collective and individual successes?

Dame Martina Milburn: We feel that we have only really started. I go back to Lucy's point, we are probably not far from ground zero and where we are going to measure our impact is over the next 12 months because we really see that is where the decisions we are making now and the bits that are starting to come out now, where we can make the difference. I think it will be in 12 months' time. I hope if I am sitting here in 12 months' time you are looking at a very different story to the one you are looking at now.

Q2344 **Ian Mearns:** In terms of the pace of the change that you would like to make, looking back on your tenure as the Chair of the Commission, would you have done anything differently from the outset, for instance, once you had appointed a new commissioner would you have said, "We will try to get you all together for a week" and then have a blitzkrieg on getting it all together and then moving on in terms of the way you have things panned out now?

Dame Martina Milburn: The issue with that, it comes back to resources and if you want a diverse commission, is having people that are in a position in their career where they can give you a week. That is something that I still think needs to be looked at around the whole public appointment system because it does not favour ordinary people.

Q2345 **Ian Mearns:** A week was just thrown out there, it could have been even two or three days or something just to get the thing going.

Dame Martina Milburn: We got going really quickly. We were all surprised by the amount we had to do on the "State of the Nation" report and that just completely took over. The one thing I would do differently is there was a delay between us interviewing all the commissioners and the commissioners being appointed. I do not know the cause of that delay. That is something you might want to find out if you think it is relevant.

The commission did not start until December. It has been six months, not 12 months.



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Q2346 **Ian Mearns:** You said that the reputation of the Commission would improve once you had fixed all its broken windows. Who broke them and are they fixed yet?

Dame Martina Milburn: No, they are not fixed. We are in the process of fixing them. We inherited a secretariat. There are only seven but there were big staff gaps and the staff that were there felt very demoralised. Nothing had happened at all for 12 months, so there was all this stuff in the pipeline that we were under pressure to start getting out immediately, which we did, and then you were straight into the very big piece of work that is the "State of the Nation". We almost feel we have not quite come up for air. Now, over the summer, we have time to understand our strategy, plus we had to commission the £1 million worth of research otherwise we would have lost the money.

What we are now doing is saying, "Right, what does this look like, five years, 10 years, 20 years, 30 years and how do we measure it?"

Q2347 **Ian Mearns:** When you were asked to take over the role as the Chair of the Commission, did you ask the person that was asking you, "Why has it taken you so long to get to this"?

Dame Martina Milburn: To get?

Q2348 **Ian Mearns:** To get to the point of asking someone to take over as Chair of the Commission. It was a big gap.

Dame Martina Milburn: It was a 12 month gap, yes. Yes, I did.

Q2349 **James Frith:** T-levels. Have you had any input or conversation with Ministers or the Department for Education about T-levels?

Dame Martina Milburn: On T-levels we agreed with the pause that was being asked for. Where we think we can have the impact on T-levels is around the work experience bit. That comes back, again, to the commissioners we have from the business world. That bit is still not worked out or ready.

Our other concern over T-levels, which again I think we mention in "State of the Nation", is around the qualifications that you have to have to do a T-level. We see it as not something that is necessarily at this point in time going to help social mobility, which is our focus.

Q2350 **James Frith:** You agreed with the request of the Permanent Secretary to postpone, and maybe even the Minister for Further Education, to give it a year?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes.

Q2351 **James Frith:** Were you disappointed when for the first time in history the Secretary of State for Education overruled the Permanent Secretary's advice on such a matter?



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Dame Martina Milburn: I was, yes. I think that actually happened before the Commission was up and running. It was not something that we had any part in but we looked at it all as part of the “State of the Nation” and we would have agreed with him.

Q2352 **James Frith:** Do you see any emerging prep that gives you comfort that it will be ready on time, or do you still have the view it should be paused?

Dame Martina Milburn: Me, personally?

Q2353 **James Frith:** As Chair of the Commission.

Dame Martina Milburn: As Chair of the Commission I think it should be paused.

Q2354 **James Frith:** It should be paused, right. Have you made that representation?

Dame Martina Milburn: No, we have not.

Q2355 **Lucy Powell:** I know you have come here and you probably feel like, in fact, we have given you a really tough time, but that is our job, sorry about that. It is trying to be helpful.

I know there is a challenge with resource and time commitments and so on, but to put it into one context, our Committee here, we meet once a week—you only meet once a month—and we have many other aspects to our job, this is a very small part of our job. The staffing team is probably about the same size as your staffing team. We do not have the £2 million research budget, but we make a lot of impact because we focus what we are doing. We have extra money in the early years. We have an Opportunity Area in the north-east. We have real focus on excluded children and so on, just in the last few months. Maybe if you just think about that model a bit more because, in order to do that, you just have to be laser like and really use the resource that you have well, not try to be too much to too many people.

Dame Martina Milburn: I completely agree with you on that.

Sammy Wright: Can I say as well, one of the things that I found—this is all very new to me—is we have come into it and we have seen the setup of the Commission and the specific targets that we have, but one of the things that does feel quite odd to me at times is that the way the Commission is set up is we make the recommendations and there is no obligation for people to answer us? That is one of the things I would like to see.

Q2356 **Lucy Powell:** Sure, well jump up and down about that.

Sammy Wright: Yes, absolutely.

Q2357 **Lucy Powell:** Use us, use others, we are here to help you, we can table parliamentary questions, we can ask questions as a Committee, use the levers that you do have and jump up and down about that. Do not come



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back here in a year or six months' time and say, "No one responded and we did not have a meeting", be agitated about it.

Sammy Wright: I suppose, on that note, I would take the opportunity here as someone who is working in the school sector right now I am going to jump and down here and now for the student premium for 16 to 19, I think that would make a radical difference to young people's lives. If you are going to do anything going forward from this, that is a major, major thing that we could get and we will be shouting about that at every available opportunity.

Q2358 **Chair:** Just to confirm, although you have your day a month and so on, you are full-time, is that right? Your secretariat is all full-time as well?

Sasha Morgan: Yes, full-time.

Q2359 **Chair:** Just to go back to the strategy issue, are you able to just give us—if I can just press you again—an indication of what that strategy is and where you are going with it? I appreciate you cannot give chapter and verse today.

Dame Martina Milburn: We are taking the recommendations in the "State of the Nation", we are taking that as our first base and we will be deciding, back to Lucy's point, exactly you are 100% right, which ones of those are going to be real key—

Q2360 **Chair:** You must have an indication after being six months in the post, in terms of commissioners, and you a year or so, what that strategy will be. Do any of you want to comment?

Dame Martina Milburn: Yes, I think the one thing everybody feels passionate about, as Sammy has just said, is the FE space. We see that as a big key cornerstone of our immediate strategy going forward.

Sammy Wright: I would add to that that, in terms of what we have discussed about how we are going to land those things, we have been focused in the Commission about what we want to do is be a commission that gets a few things really right rather than throwing lots of stuff out there to sit vaguely. We are in the process of refining down those few things and what we want to be doing is going to Ministers, to Government and saying what is happening, not simply waiting for them to respond to us.

Q2361 **Chair:** One of the strategy elements is supporting FE but you are not giving me an overall—which is very good, I am very happy with that—do you want to comment?

Sasha Morgan: There are some emerging strands that are coming out. I can run through some of the things the commissioners have already talked about. There are a number of things that chime with what the Committee has said before. One is we are looking at methodologies for how we can assess major policies. We do not use the term "social justice" but "social mobility" and "inequality", so audit processes that we can look



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and make assessment about how progressive and how they target those who we think are most vulnerable.

There are elements around a lot of the amplification of the “What works”. I mentioned that in brief. We think we should be doing a lot more work in that space. There has been a lot of investment in that area, but we know that the take up is not necessarily as good and the Commission’s voice can be used to focus on those.

There is a lot more work that we think is coming out, particularly Martina mentioned looking at the interfaces with different forms of health, both mental and physical, and social mobility and how that works. That will be forming our future workspace.

The third focus, partly because of the composition of the Commission, a lot of the work will be outside Westminster in a way the Commission has not done before. We talked about the employers’ toolkit but it is what came afterwards. There is work particularly with three areas of employers based on some of the knowledge of our commissioners. One is in retail, large scale retailers; looking at SMEs. A lot of the progress that has been made on employers on people with lower socioeconomic backgrounds has been large professional firms but how does that work when you do not have the same kind of HR capacity? How does that work if you are relatively small employer? That is another area. Then, of course, work with the publishing industry, which is an area that has struggled to have useful forms of representation.

The three areas of employers that sit underneath the practical work to put toolkits out, they are some of the things you are likely to see coming through in the strategy.

Dame Martina Milburn: The final thing was around downward mobility, which is probably the most controversial. Our academic on the board is particularly keen and excited.

Q2362 **Chair:** Our proposal in our report about a social impact assessment on domestic legislation or domestic policies, is that something that you would be planning to do?

Sasha Morgan: What I talked about at the beginning, it is slightly different, we are thinking about methodology and I am not sure it would be all Departments because at the moment it is looking at the costings. We have looked at methodologies for how we might do that for probably a very discrete number of either Departments or core policies that we would identify. My understanding—it may be erroneous—was that you were talking about like a blanket approach where we would have the right to do it on all—

Q2363 **Chair:** Just like you have equality assessments on policies and so on, you would have a total impact assessment on a range of key domestic policies.



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Sasha Morgan: We are talking about, within what we think we are capable of doing, looking at a very discrete number but looking at what the methodology would be.

Chair: Thank you very much for sustaining some tough questioning from all of us. Thank you for your public service. Even though we have had difficult questions, I am very supportive of the work. I want there to be a Social Mobility and Social Justice Commission. I want it to have teeth. I want it to have a real impact and to push whatever Government, whatever party, into pursuing social justice in our country. I am very supportive but it is our job to try to tease out what your role is and what your impact is. Thank you very much indeed.