

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Adult skills and lifelong learning](#), HC 278

Tuesday 29 September 2020

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

Questions 58 - 121

Witnesses

I: Gillian Keegan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills.



Examination of witnesses

Witness: Gillian Keegan MP.

Q58 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Welcome to our Committee. Thank you for coming, Minister. For the benefit of the tape and those listening, could you introduce yourself and your position, please?

Gillian Keegan: I am Gillian Keegan. I am the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills.

Q59 **Chair:** Thank you. Given the announcements that have come out today that have been trailed in the media, could you set out for the Committee what the Government are announcing so that Parliament can hear what is going on?

Gillian Keegan: A couple of weeks ago we announced the Plan for Jobs, which was really focused and targeted on young people, but today's announcement is focused and targeted on adults, how we enable adults who, through no fault of their own, may find themselves redundant, working in an industry that has been highly impacted by coronavirus and may be looking to accelerate their reskilling, upskilling or getting a new opportunity. It is focused on making sure that we support adults through this process.

The first thing is to make sure that every adult has an entitlement to level 3, which is an A-level equivalent full-time course. That is specifically in areas that have higher value, so we are making sure that it matches the skills gaps in the economy. There are flexible loans to reach the higher levels and that is also flexible learning. We are looking at making how you access learning and loans more flexible, and that is for the higher levels, up to levels 4 and 5.

We have announced today the expansion of the Skills Toolkit, which we introduced very quickly to help people on furlough to increase people's employability during these uncertain times. The Skills Toolkit has expanded today from 17 to 80 courses. There have been two initial pilots in digital bootcamp. We will continue with those and look to roll out further bootcamps in other areas. At the moment we are thinking about construction and engineering. Of course that is on top of the apprenticeships. We know that 50% of apprentices are adults using apprenticeships to upskill, reskill and get new opportunities.

Q60 **Chair:** Will there be any support for maintenance grants or loans for disadvantaged students in these new packages?

Gillian Keegan: There are discretionary funds to help support disadvantaged students or those who have additional barriers and hurdles. They can be used for anything, for example, transport and childcare. During coronavirus they were used to make sure everybody had digital connectivity, so sometimes they were used for devices and



data. There is the system where we have discretionary bursary loans and the colleges have some funding to utilise those.

Q61 **Chair:** Do you have details of the courses that these funds will be available for at the moment?

Gillian Keegan: I do not have details of the courses but the skills recovery plan that we have put in place, which was increasing the entitlement for 19 year-olds, went through some of the areas that mapped well on to where we have real skills shortages in the economy. They are quite broad ranging: education, health and social care, construction, engineering, teaching, policing, anything to do with data and digital, nursing. There are many areas where, if you remember, Rob, probably what we would have been talking about before coronavirus is how we were going to fill these skills gaps. We have hundreds of thousands of skills gaps in all these areas and we need to upskill and reskill our population so that we can fill these skills gaps. It is in the areas where we know there is a lot of employer demand.

Q62 **Chair:** Do you have any figures for the take-up that you expect or want for these new announcements?

Gillian Keegan: No, we do not. It is available to everybody. This is now a universal entitlement for anybody. It was there up to the age of 23. Now it is from 24 up to whatever age you still have the energy and motivation; there is no age limit. We know that we will be living a lot longer and having many different career changes. Many of us are in our second career, but second and third careers will become part of the future of work. We want to be there to make sure that you can get the support at whatever age and whatever stage you want to develop your next career.

Chair: We are going to go into some detail about adult learning. Before I move on to some of the things I want to ask you about, particularly community learning, do any colleagues have any specific questions on today's announcement and what the Minister has just said?

Q63 **David Simmonds:** We heard from LGA research that there is about £730 million unspent in European Social Fund budgets that will have to be returned to Brussels if they are not spent by the end of the year. Is there an opportunity to repurpose some of that money to provide resources to support this work?

Gillian Keegan: We are doing some work at the moment to look at what the replacement for the European Social Fund will look like and how we transition from one to another, so I guess that will be part of the discussions. I do not know the specifics, but I imagine there is some sort of restrictions. There are strict criteria for what it can be used for. I know the whole discussion about what we do to reach the hardest-to-reach learners and to replace that is going on now and there are a number of proposals to have our own UK version of it.



Q64 **Fleur Anderson:** It is very good to see you, Minister. Thank you for taking the time to be with us today. It is such an important issue for employment across all of our constituencies. I have a question about access. A barrier to level 3 is often childcare for many people. I have been working in an ESOL teaching session where the biggest barrier was childcare. Have you given any thought to or will there be any plans for childcare services to be available alongside the level 3 teaching to enable people to take up the offer?

Gillian Keegan: We have the universal childcare offer of 30 hours per week. In addition, the bursary can be flexed to cover specific childcare arrangements, but we have not looked further than that at having a specific childcare package that is linked to this. We have a lot of discussions about making sure that the 30 hours is available and that people can utilise that very easily. That is a relatively new scheme. I have spoken to a number of people, particularly in the area of community learning—which is very often women going back after having a family, looking to improve their career prospects—and how they work with the colleges and how their flexibility is enabled as well is a key area in what we want to achieve going forward.

We have all gone through a massive lesson with coronavirus. Everything went online by necessity, but it has uncovered a lot of our capability. We now can deliver quite a lot of very high quality experience online. I think that being able to flex that blended learning will help mothers, enabling them to adapt that to their family situations.

Fleur Anderson: I agree with you. Community learning is absolutely key. If childcare can be provided in the place of learning alongside them instead of only through the additional childcare offers, that can unlock all of the courses to people who find it hardest to access them.

Q65 **Kim Johnson:** Good morning, Gillian. I want some clarification about the flexible loans that you have mentioned. If people lose their jobs and they have the universal entitlement to full-time training, how are they expected to pay for the loans if they are on universal credit?

Gillian Keegan: There are a number of things that are free. The Skills Toolkit is free. The new level 3 entitlement, up to A-levels, will be free for all adults. The flexible loan structure is making the courses more flexible and making loans more flexible for higher levels, level 4, level 5, even up to level 6, so it is more similar to the university grades. The vast majority of people will be able to access for free something that will enable them to develop their skills, particularly in areas that are highly valuable. We have very few people doing levels 4 and 5. We are trying to encourage more people to do levels 4 and 5—that is HNC and HND equivalents—and they will be offered through the loan system, but the payback on them is very good. They are very highly valued by employers and many employers will sponsor people to do those.

Q66 **Kim Johnson:** Can local authorities allocate any of their unspent



apprenticeship levy to help the anticipated rise in youth unemployment?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, and it is a very important point. We have been trying to make the 25% that is unutilised be passed on and work better more quickly. We would like to be able to use it today. We have introduced a number of flexibilities and we are working with the mayoral combined authorities, some of which are basically acting like a clearing house, a broker almost, to take all the unspent levy that can be transferred and use it to provide opportunities and to be able to lubricate and pump-prime the SME market. That is something we have been trying to do, but we need to do it more urgently. We have introduced flexibilities and we have a number of pilots across a lot of the combined authorities.

Kim Johnson: Thank you. Good news.

Q67 **Tom Hunt:** As a minimum, should funding for the education and skills strand of the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund match that of the previous European Social Fund? Do the Department have enough input into plans for the successor programme to the European Social Fund?

Gillian Keegan: We are trying to make sure that over the course of this we have a fund that meets our needs. At the same time, we have more investment going into other areas. Overall, it is not really about the budget lines. It is about addressing the need and making sure that we have sufficient funds to address those who are further away from the employment market, which is what that was addressing.

Even without that, we have already tripled the number of traineeships, which focused on trying to get young people who are further away from the market. As we are increasing lots of budgets and our focus in this area, I am less focused on which particular pot it is but on it meeting the needs of the users, whether they have a particular disadvantage they are trying to overcome, or whether they are further away from the market, and to make sure that they get all the opportunities they can in making that available.

Q68 **Tom Hunt:** We have heard a number of mayoral combined authorities call for that money to be devolved down to them. It seems to me that they are probably best placed to know their areas and how to invest that money. We have also heard a lot about, when it comes to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, money going to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. Perhaps that misses a trick and should be further localised.

Gillian Keegan: I think a lot of the AEB and the prosperity fund is devolved to the areas that have that structure in place. I think there is only seven that have had it devolved so far and it will be up to nine. Most of it is devolved today, but for the rest of the country clearly it is not devolved because we do not have the structures in place. We agree. Trying to make sure that we have a local labour market view of the vacancies and key skills gaps, that the provision matches and that we can optimise the opportunities for everyone is key. That is what we are planning on doing.



Q69 **Chair:** Will there be additional help for those with special educational needs in taking up the new offering from the National Skills Fund?

Gillian Keegan: We have the obligation to make sure that all of our offers are accessible to anybody with special educational needs and that will include this as well. We will definitely make sure that these courses are accessible to those with special educational needs.

Q70 **Chair:** Will how those with special educational needs are able to benefit from this be reflected in whatever you publish?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, we will definitely make them available to people and that will be published. We are very concerned to make sure that our courses are accessible.

Q71 **Chair:** I am going to move on to community learning. To my best knowledge, the last time the Government put forward a robust strategy on community learning was in 2011 when it was published and it was called "New challenges, new chances". Why has there been no strategic paper on adult community learning since this time? How high up is community learning on the list of priorities for the Department?

Gillian Keegan: It is a key focus of the Department. As I said before, community learning tends to focus on specific groups and particularly women. I think about 73% of the take-up is women and women looking to go back to work. We are looking to make sure that we have a system that works very well and is focused on and aligned with employment. A couple of things have happened in the DfE that I think are quite significant. The first thing is that we have embraced employer-led standards in all our qualifications to make sure that what people are investing their time, and sometimes their money, in studying will lead to a job and to a better job. That is the real focus. We have very little data on community learning and I have tried to get a lot more clarity, because it is devolved to a lot of local authorities.

Q72 **Chair:** The announcement is not about community learning. I think it is a very good announcement, but why isn't it more of a priority for the Department? What monitoring of community learning are you doing to identify where there are cold spots, where there is need, and are you doing enough to widen the reach of community learning centres?

Gillian Keegan: The announcement today is very much focused on the economic outcomes for individuals, making sure that they can have an offer that improves their employability and their chances of a job. That is the biggest focus we have at the moment because of the impact that coronavirus has had in disrupting our economy. We have some analysis going on to see exactly what benefits community learning and making sure that we understand the things that are valuable for community learning, but there is a full offer for adults. We are trying to make sure that every segment of our society has an opportunity to learn something and to be supported into things that will benefit them.



Q73 Chair: If you take, for example, Ofsted's 2018-2019 annual report, 92% of community learning and skills providers were rated good or outstanding. The head of HOLEX has said that community learning centres are right at the top of their game. We have a 2016 randomised control trial on community-based English language provision showing that students doubled their English proficiency and improved their social interaction ability. There are many statistics out there about the success of community learning and yet very little is said about it by Ministers. There is a second-hand view that some senior officials in the Department don't regard community learning as important and that all of it should be focused on what you have just described as the economic side of the equation, while I would regard both as the economic side.

Gillian Keegan: Community learning includes access to basic numeracy and basic literacy, and we have just added basic digital skills to that, which was introduced in August. English as a second language of course is included in community learning. All of that is absolutely vital in helping people progress into the workplace and also on to other qualifications and skills. They are the building blocks. You are absolutely right about community learning. I have visited a number of community learning institutions, meeting people who perhaps had not even thought that this was available for them, would not even have the confidence to walk through the door of a college, who have been helped to the point where they can overcome any barriers and get the basic skills. I have met many now doing level 4.

Q74 Chair: In the Government evaluation of 2018, 52% of the learners who started courses with significant mental health issues, anxiety and depression, no longer presented those symptoms at the end of their courses. We know that the mental health and wellbeing of adults and young people have suffered enormously during the pandemic. Have you considered actively the role that community learning centres can play in our recovery from the coronavirus?

Gillian Keegan: Yes. I think every sector can play a part in helping us recover from coronavirus. There has been an awful lot of investment and focus on mental health, particularly mental health for students, young people in college and so on. There has been that investment. Community learning has been badged in a particular way in how the budgets work in the DfE. What we are moving on to is talking about all those individuals, segments of society, individual needs, understanding their values, making sure we help them overcome and making sure they get the best possible support to be able to get on in life. We have an opportunity with the National Skills Fund and the things we are announcing today—

Q75 Chair: Yes, but that is not about community learning. We know that Government investment in adult learning has fallen considerably, and I am talking about specific community adult learning. This has coincided with a decline of 23% in participation in community learning since 2011 and providers have to turn to other pots to finance their offices. Let me quote the Centre for Social Justice, who say that funding streams are



dizzying—as many as 10—“ESFA’s 16–19 study programme; 19+ AEB non-formula funding; 19+ AEB formula funding; 19+ advanced learner loans; 16+ apprenticeships levy funding; the ESF/Communities Lottery Fund; the DfE’s Flexible Learning Fund; Heritage Lottery Fund; the ESF/DWP’s Way2Work programme; and individual learner fees”. Surely there is an argument for consolidating these schemes to allow providers to focus more of their effort on front-line delivery. My colleague Tom mentioned the European Social Fund, but post Brexit would the Shared Prosperity Fund not serve as a good opportunity to consolidate these funding streams? I am talking specifically about adult community learning.

Gillian Keegan: I think all of them offer an opportunity. The reason I broadened it out is because we are talking about segments of society and overcoming their needs. They all offer an opportunity for us to simplify the system. The vast majority of those that you read out were DfE funds where you apply for different pockets of funding. It is complex. We are looking to simplify that through FE reform to make sure that it is easier for people to understand and target the funding.

That is definitely part of DfE funding reform, but we are always trying to demonstrate and show the value for money, the investment and what the outcomes have done, and how they have changed the learners’ outcomes. Some of that funding has been focused on specific outcomes, either through the European Union or other measures. We are trying to get a specific policy outcome, which is why the fund has been structured in a particular way.

Q76 **Chair:** What is your strategy as a Minister to boost adult community learning across our country?

Gillian Keegan: We need to make sure that everybody has access to all the things that are basics that will enable them to get on and have access to wider learning as well. In particular, we need to make sure that we have basic English, basic maths, and English as a second language if you need that support, but basic digital skills has come very much into it.

Q77 **Chair:** I agree with all that. I am talking specifically about adult community learning. Should there be an adult community learning centre in every town? Should the funding go up? Should the way you fund it, in giving most of it to local government, be changed? What is the strategy for specifically adult community learning, welcoming all the other schemes that there are? We have not heard much about it. The Government have said hardly anything at all about adult community learning over the past couple of years, so I want to know what is specifically happening about adult community learning.

Gillian Keegan: The specific strategy is to focus on the learners and figure out how to help them, wherever they are in life, to get access to overcoming some of the challenges they have with basic skills, access to training, more modular training, and more flexible training. Whether it is



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delivered through community learning centres, FE colleges, training providers and so on is less of an issue. There has been a lot of focus—and I would argue a bit too much focus—on just the system. It is about making sure that we unlock all the opportunities for learners and they will be delivered through community learning centres, colleges and other providers. It is about making sure that we get the outcomes right for the learners.

Q78 Chair: To be clear, I was not focusing on the system, because I quoted to you the impressive outcomes of community learning and skills providers earlier on from Ofsted and in terms of mental health and other things. This is different from the excellent National Skills Fund that you have announced and the apprenticeship policy. I am still trying to find out what the Government's policy is on adult community learning, which is often a very different audience. It looks after the deprived in very deprived parts of the country.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, and clearly all of the schemes that we have will be to make sure that we access those who are the most disadvantaged and further away from the workplace. We talked about the replacement of the European Social Fund with a new version of the same. We have all kinds of different schemes, including traineeships, all focused on that need. But what I have said to the team here—a bit like you read out before, Rob, with lots and lots of different budget lines—it is not about the budget lines. It is about enabling the learners and making sure we access them in the most effective way possible. That is what we are talking about in everything we are doing. Introducing new things such as the digital basic skills, which we did in August, recognises that everybody now will need help if they are further away from getting access online.

But specifically about community learning, it is an important part of our overall offer and it does a great deal to help those further away from the workplace into work. That is what we are focused on, helping those further away or helping those people who are in one career and need to shift to another get on a line of sight to work. It is probably a bit of a shift in these economic times to say that we need to make sure that what we do delivers the outcome for people that will help them get on in their employment.

Q79 Christian Wakeford: Thank you, Minister. We have heard that the uptake of the national retraining scheme has been relatively slow. Is it still the intention to roll out Get Help to Retrain across England in 2020, considering that it is probably more important now than ever, with entire sectors and industries facing collapse and mass redundancies?

Gillian Keegan: Yes. The national retraining scheme was announced in 2017. The first part of it was Get Help to Retrain, which was a consumer-facing website that was rolled out in six areas to test and pilot what worked, in particular how to motivate adults and help them overcome their barriers to engage with training again. Since then we have had a bigger and broader announcement with the National Skills Fund to spend



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much more in the area of adult skills and take account of the huge technological changes that are going on all around us—and that was even before coronavirus, which has accelerated some of those—so that we have the right investment.

The lessons from those six pilots are that adults have access to flexible learning and modular learning, that adults are helped to be motivated, and that there is a clear line of sight to jobs. The thing that motivates people to want to study is a clear line of sight to a job. What we have learnt from Get Help to Retrain will be part of our new offer for the National Skills Fund. We will be building on that, but obviously we have a much bigger scheme now than that initially announced in 2017.

Q80 Christian Wakeford: You said previously that approximately 2,700 people have accessed the Get Help to Retrain scheme. What assessments have been done on the outputs to measure the improvements in their employment skills?

Gillian Keegan: I think it is about 3,600 users who have accessed it now and they go through the results of those all the time. I will have to come back on how many people have gone on to get a job. A point of the national retraining scheme is also to link with local employers and opportunities and so on, which I imagine has probably been impacted a little by coronavirus. The key learnings from it have been about what will make more people, as adults, sign up and reengage with education to enable them to get better prospects. That has been the focus of it. It is 3,600 users, so quite a small sample size, but still big enough to give us some confidence that the learnings are relevant.

Q81 Christian Wakeford: Do you have sufficient data and information from the trial to learn any lessons for a wider rollout across the entire country?

Gillian Keegan: I think there are a lot of lessons from it. I do not have all the details here, but if you go on to the scheme you can see some things that possibly need to be improved, like where you start and where you finish and how you navigate your way through it. The key learning is the line of sight to a job and to make progression and how you progress and making those steps clearly visible to everybody. I have seen some great examples of this where you can progress through the Ambulance Service, for example, starting at a level 2 and going right the way up to a level 7. They are attracting lots of people because of the simplicity of the scheme that allows you to progress. That is an apprenticeship standard but the big learning is to motivate adults to put in their time, when everybody is super busy with families, with a clear line of sight to a job.

Q82 Ian Mearns: Minister, while I am not wanting to have a go at employers per se, because there are some very good, progressive and very engaged employers out there, unfortunately across the piece employer-led training is stagnating and the number of employees receiving job-related training fell from 4.2 million in 2004 to 3.8 million last year, a 9.5% decline in 15 years. This is at a time when the overall workforce has grown



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significantly. In other words, the proportion of people doing training supported by their employers is going down.

Is it acceptable that the Department's employer skills survey found that a third of employers had not provided any training for their staff over the last 12 months? While a third did not provide any, many did not provide much at all. What are we going to do to reengage or engage employers into upskilling the workforce of the future? Businesses have a real responsibility and that is the sort of responsibility that is widely accepted in many of our competitor nations.

Gillian Keegan: It is a very important point. It is a partnership between employers, learners and the Department for Education to make sure that we have a system that works well for learners. I have worked for many employers and they have all massively recognised the value of training. Every piece of my training has been paid for by an employer from the age of 16. There are many employers who invest in people and provide access to all kinds of training, but that is not everybody.

One of the great successes—and I do believe it a success—is the apprenticeship system. It has forced larger companies to pay a levy, which will be shared with smaller companies or be used to make sure that people have access to training. I am often asked by employers to introduce more flexibilities on the levy and so on and I say to them, “You have two years to spend the levy on apprenticeships and that is what we want you to do. We want you to design and build apprenticeship systems and schemes that will enable people to be upskilled”.

What that has left, and this is part of this announcement today, is that it is good for apprenticeships, which will be a minimum of one year, but how do we have access for employees or future employees or those who are redundant to shorter-term courses, to more flexible learning? We have things that we have introduced rather quickly, like the Skills Toolkit that we did with employers who were offering training that we offered for free. Today we have announced that has gone from 17 to 80 courses and they are fantastic courses. I have done some myself. They are very worthwhile and they are investments by employers.

Q83 Ian Mearns: That all sounds well and good, but unfortunately we have a situation where far too many employers are not engaged in the process at all. There has to be some carrot and some stick there. There has been a significant restructuring of the employment base and many more SMEs. In parts of the world like my own, the very big heavy engineering companies do not exist to the same extent. How are we going to get employers to engage in this process of preparing their own workforce? Otherwise we have a situation where all too many employers are willing to let somebody else do it and then use the jobs market to recruit people who already have training skills. How are we going to get around that? What is your assessment of what should be the balance of cost sharing for adult training between employers, Government and individuals?



Gillian Keegan: The apprenticeship scheme has generated £2.5 billion, which is a lot more, double what we spent in 2010. The key thing is how that gets to be working well for SMEs so that they gain more confidence with the system, with apprentices and training people, and the loyalty you get from somebody you train. This has always been an age-old dilemma: do I engage in training myself or do I let somebody else do it? I had a conversation with a number of NHS trusts the other day who said, "We have had massive skill shortages in nursing and in some parts of our National Health Service. We have been away to Spain, Portugal and the Philippines and all kinds of places". We need to make the effort to be more strategic, to help use the apprenticeship system to train more nurses. We have that now going right the way up all the nursing standards. I am a big fan of the apprenticeship system, having done one myself. It worked out very well for me, having started at 16, but it is a fantastic way of getting all parts of the supply chain to engage. I am very hopeful that the 25% gets through to the small and medium-sized businesses and gains their confidence to invest in training.

Q84 **Ian Mearns:** But there is a fly in the ointment, Minister. You have been through the apprenticeship route, but all too many young people who we come across as a Committee say they have never heard about apprenticeships. I am afraid to say that the flow of information, advice and guidance for young people has not been good, but it is virtually non-existent for adults who might want to think about retraining. How are we going to get embedded within the system a good process of independent, impartial advice and guidance for young people but also for adults?

Minister, I am afraid to say it, but there is lots of bad advice out there and it is usually led by bums-on-seats funding regimes at whatever level, because providers in particular are interested in getting people into their courses. Whether that is the right course for the individual or not is another matter. How are we going to get over that? We need to beef up independent, impartial advice and guidance at all levels.

Gillian Keegan: You are absolutely spot on. I think apprenticeships are the best-kept secrets in the whole country. I did one 35 years ago. It is about careers advice in schools but, as you say, for adults as well. Being able to see your progression through an apprenticeship or these full-time courses we have announced today, being able to see how you can get somewhere is the biggest, clearest motivator. Careers is part of the FE reform and we will be putting a lot more effort into making sure that that piece works. You are absolutely right, that navigates and sets people off on their life path and whether that is a good one or whether that is one that the advice didn't work out, at that critical time having all the information is vital. That is absolutely a key part that we have to get right and improve. It is not good enough today.

Q85 **Ian Mearns:** Given the Government's announcement today, will there also be support for people who have previous qualifications that are no longer relevant to their local jobs market? In other words, they need to retrain, but they have a level 3 or level 4 possibly in another skill that is



no longer relevant in their local jobs market. Will they be supported as well?

Gillian Keegan: That is supported but it is through the loan system. It is only if you have not reached up to a level 3. I think it is up to about 10 million adults who have not done that. You are right, accessing that in shorter and more digestible chunks is how we will help people and also making it flexible, making the most of the online capability for learning and blended learning now. That is part of the offer that we will be setting out and that is what we are working on.

Q86 Ian Mearns: I think the Department and Ministers need to give that some thought because a currently irrelevant qualification is no good in the jobs market. Quite often, because of businesses and local economies moving on, people have trained in particular things where their skills are no longer relevant. Do they not deserve support as well?

Gillian Keegan: Yes. Don't forget that 2 million people have retrained and reskilled or upskilled using the apprenticeship system—for all its flaws in people not knowing it exists—and that is available to everybody. Obviously you need to get the job that goes alongside it, but most adults are very much looking for the job aspect as well. By that time you have bills to pay and you have to keep in work. We are trying to make it easier for people who are in work, even if they want to shift to a different career, to be able to do that. I think the apprenticeship scheme is also a great way to go up the levels.

Q87 Ian Mearns: To quickly recap from my perspective, you are truly considering beefing up impartial advice and guidance at all levels?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, absolutely, and that is both in schools and for adults.

Ian Mearns: Thank you very much.

Q88 Dr Caroline Johnson: Thank you, Minister. Going back to the points made by Ian on the relevance of training and Christian on the outcomes, you said there had been 3,600 people who have engaged in retraining, which is great. In order to know whether a scheme is working, you need to understand what your desired outcome is. Is it in employment, short term or long term? What do you consider to be success in retraining? What specific data are you collecting from those 3,600 people, or from a proportion of them, to assess whether your schemes are retraining the right people in the right skills in the right quantity, and whether those people are gaining gainful employment as a result?

Gillian Keegan: To make sure it is completely clear, this is not everybody who has retrained. Obviously we have many other ways that people have retrained, including the apprenticeship system, but this is the Get Help to Retrain pilot. We have the data that are being collected, which will be available in November/December, so we will get much more of the granular detail, destinations where people ended up and so on.



One of the key learnings has definitely been about the need to motivate people through them seeing a clear line to a job, seeing that if they invest their time and energy into training, by doing this, it will lead them into that opportunity. That is overwhelmingly what has come out. That has been one of the key insights we have had. In terms of the granular detail, November/December is when we will get the data back on those 3,600 users and where they have ended up.

Q89 Dr Caroline Johnson: What level of detail are you collecting on those people and what sort of figures would you consider to be successful?

Gillian Keegan: Because it was a pilot of six places with a relatively small number of users, this is not a stop/go or go/no-go point. We already know that we need to invest in this area of adult skills and adult training, so in a way it has been superseded in terms of the knowledge of the need. In a way, coronavirus has accelerated that to a point where we know that there are people who were in jobs in January and February that they thought they would be still in and would keep for years to come. This threat of automation, artificial intelligence and robotics, which is what we talked about in terms of the need to shift skills, would be somewhere in the future, and some of those things have been accelerated massively. We know already that we need to invest in this, which is why the announcements today were so heavily focused on adult skills. We will use these pilots to make sure the offer, how we reach people and the flexibility is there to make sure it is as widely used as possible.

Q90 Dr Caroline Johnson: I appreciate, Minister, that Covid has provided a challenging environment and may mean that the skills that employers need may be different to those they required earlier in the year, but what is your Department doing and what data is it collecting to try to ensure that you are training people in the right skills, and what proportion of those people—allowing for the fact that Covid may have changed that figure—going on to full-time employment would you consider a success of the scheme that makes it worthwhile to invest in as a Government?

Chair: Just a brief answer, if possible.

Gillian Keegan: We collect destination data, whether you went into a job and what level of job you went into. We get that back in November and December. If you look at the apprenticeship scheme, I think 91% end up either studying as a higher-level apprentice or in full-time jobs after the apprenticeship. Those are really good outcomes. That is probably the top bar. We do not set an outcome ratio. We still need to solve this problem, which is making sure that adults have easy, flexible, modular access to skills and training via apprenticeship schemes if you are in work or via full-time study as well. That is how we are going to do that, by making it as broad as possible.

Chair: Tom, can you make it a quick one, please?

Q91 Tom Hunt: I think it is quite important so I will spend the necessary



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amount of time on it. Devolution is central to this. I do not think it is a side issue. I have seen an example of the adult education system not working at all when it was centralised—there was no strategy, there was no coherence—and I saw it turned around locally when power over the AEB budget was devolved. I do not think this is a fringe issue.

I am glad to hear that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund money has been passed down to seven or nine mayoral authorities, but that still leaves the vast majority of the country where that has not happened, including where my constituency is in Suffolk. If the structures are not there to enable that devolution then I would advise that those structures be put in place as soon as possible because it makes a critical difference. There needs to be coherence between the different local areas, but local areas need to be empowered to have a tailored approach to skills in their area and the specific skills needs in their area.

Gillian Keegan: I 100% agree. At the moment we obviously have half of the budget devolved to those areas, those mayoral combined authorities, but the whole focus of FE reform is to make sure that we can have a system that takes into account local players and local activity, and also makes sure that provision is very strong and that people know what provision they should be investing in for their area. It is too high level at the moment, too broad brush.

There are two things we need to do. One is to embed the employer-led standards so people are studying things that are truly valuable to employers across this country. The second is to shape that locally and focus that locally based on the local jobs market and opportunities. Those two things are absolutely vital and are the key pillar of FE reform.

Q92 **Tom Hunt:** There are some officials in the Department who seem to be a little bit protectionist over devolving these matters. That was a couple of years ago and I am sure it has all changed for the better, but I would stress that it was the case in the area where I was working that money was being spent on basket-weaving and people brushing up on their French before a holiday. Ultimately that is not the way this money should be spent. It should be spent on skills, upskilling and transforming people's lives.

Gillian Keegan: Absolutely right. It is a massive system and obviously you will get some of these anomalies, but the line of sight to a job and being able to get on and get up in the workplace has probably motivated every single one of us—certainly me—for every bit of study we have done, and that is what we need to make sure of. In terms of how it is done, it is outcome-based. I am mostly focused on the learner and making sure that they get a good job, which helps the employer, which helps the economy. That is who we are serving.

Q93 **Chair:** Given what Ian and others have said about the lack of employer training—though of course your announcement will make a difference today—and given that companies get a research and development credit



from the Treasury for the amount of research they do, would you not agree that a skills tax credit that was targeted to incentivise employers to offer training to lower-skilled employees would help close the nation's skills deficit?

Gillian Keegan: I know that has been talked of a number of times and it is an interesting idea. Again, the key thing is making sure that we get the right outcomes. Both you and I have spoken about it and I think you have probably had this answer several times. When we have asked people to look at that across various countries, they have come back and said that this sometimes does not result in the right outcome. Obviously the apprenticeship levy is the biggest skills investment change that we have made over the last few years, but they continue to look at these things. What is it that is going to make this system work better? At the moment I am not being told that that has necessarily the right outcome-based support, but I know, Chair, it is something that you have mentioned several times and I am sure that they will continue to consider it. Anything that makes a difference and that gets people to invest in the right skills training is something that we will continually keep under review.

Q94 **Kim Johnson:** Minister, you have mentioned that there is a massive skills shortage in certain sectors. There is an anticipated shortage of 250,000 social care workers. Can you explain why you think this is and your expectations of the take-up of the initiative that you have announced today? Will the increase in skills result in an increase in pay to this workforce?

Gillian Keegan: In my experience, an increase in skills normally does follow an increase in pay. That is where you have more skills and you have more to offer to the workplace. I think social care has had some specific issues around pay, which you mentioned, and around using people who they could get access to very easily. One thing that has changed during the coronavirus is our focus on the importance of social care, how valuable that is as a career and how valuable it is to all of our old people. I was at a care home last week. It is unbelievable how valuable these people are, people who have not seen their relatives, apart from through a window, for months.

I believe—and myself and others have looked at this in the past—that we do need to professionalise social care. There are now a number of apprenticeships in social care, through all of the levels of social care and nursing. What we need to do is make those work much more flexibly together. I still think there is more work to do in this area. We have just introduced the new T Level in education and early years. Expanding that in the health sector, in health and social care, will also be a good start to get the right skills and people with high skill levels, because it is in many cases a high skill job.

Q95 **Kim Johnson:** I was going to ask why you think there is a shortage, because you have mentioned shortages in other sectors, Minister, and



that will require a different type of training. Going forward in terms of Covid and a lot of training now being online, how do you anticipate that particular sector being supported?

Gillian Keegan: I think the apprenticeship scheme is still a very good use for this sector. One of the things we have seen is this levy being used for access more broadly in health and social care. To me, we now have many apprenticeship standards in dementia care, in specific end of life care, in general social care and in a number of specialties in social care, so I would suspect now that obviously we have this change in our economy, and increased redundancies from some of the job roles that people have had in the past being severely impacted by coronavirus, people will be attracted by health and social care. In a way, while coronavirus has been terrible, it has been a great advert for the health service and for social care. People are coming forward now more and more wanting to work in those sectors and get the right training in those sectors.

Q96 **Kim Johnson:** Gillian, where do you see Individual Learning Accounts fitting in in terms of this new initiative and the future of the lifelong learning offer?

Gillian Keegan: Having the opportunity to study level 3 full-time as well as part-time, and to be able to go back and study level 3 in health and social care—there are a number of vocational and technical qualifications in that area—will open up a whole new cohort who perhaps have always dreamed of going into this, but for one reason or another went off on to another path and who would like to go back into nursing, health and social care. I have met many people on my travels who have retrained in their 40s to get into health and social care because it was something they always wanted to do but never had the chance to.

Q97 **Fleur Anderson:** I would like to ask, Minister, about green jobs. Adult skills and lifelong learning are central to a jobs-led approach and to tackling the climate emergency as well as in-work poverty and unemployment. What work is the Department doing to forecast what jobs will be needed under a green economy, to increase relevant courses and to recruit people to those courses to make sure that we are able to train in the skills needed for new green jobs?

Gillian Keegan: We do have a number of apprenticeship standards that are green jobs, everything from modular building to renewables and work on that technology. That is something that we have been starting and the industry has been pushing that in a way as well. We are also working with the ECITB, which is the engineering sector, which has a lot of people at the moment working in oil and gas who want to shift those skills over into the renewables sector. We are working with them to facilitate that.

I have also been working with the Minister for Energy in BEIS to figure out how we put this focus on green jobs because you are right, that is a huge opportunity, there are huge shortages and skill shortages and we



need to make sure we are clear about those and that we make that offer available. I expect that some of the level 3 will be focused on these kinds of capabilities in the future. That is an opportunity. Even though coronavirus has disrupted our economy and hit us for six, in a way—it has disrupted our lives and we were not expecting it—we had a massive skill shortage going into this and we had the green jobs revolution that we needed to solve as well. We do have lots of opportunities to sort those out.

Q98 Fleur Anderson: I look forward to watching and mapping that as it rolls out. I would like to move on and talk about spending. Do you agree with the Institute of Fiscal Studies, cited in the Augar review, that spending on adult education fell by 45% in real terms between 2009-10 and 2017-18?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, because that figure is looking at adult education, but I do think it does slightly miss the point that at the same time we had a big rise in investment in apprenticeships, 50% of which is used for adult education and training. Yes, in terms of that budget and access to full-time courses for adults, but of course we also at the same time had a parallel path that we were investing in. I think we have invested £2.5 billion since 2010, of which half is used by adults.

Q99 Fleur Anderson: I did see the result of these cuts in my area of London and in the courses that were available for uptake. Will you be making the case for a real terms increase in the adult education budget in the next spending review?

Gillian Keegan: The announcement today, which is ahead of the spending review, has effectively said that we will now have access to level 3 for any adult that wants it in those areas that map on to where we have skills needs in the country, and where they are high-value courses to employers and are going to lead you to a job. That is the announcement today. Every adult in this country, as of April 2021, will be able to go and study level 3 full-time to be able to get the skills they need to retrain.

Q100 Fleur Anderson: Are you saying this is the end of the increases or for the next spending review will you be going to battle with the Exchequer as well?

Gillian Keegan: No. Obviously we have the National Skills Fund, we have FE reform and of course we have a spending review bid that is focused around supporting the FE reform and that White Paper making sure that we focus on technical education and the power of technical education and vocational training in this country. But I think it is good news that we have been able to announce this today and it certainly is a big step forward to give that lifelong learning capability to people when they are ready to go back and study.

Q101 Christian Wakeford: Participation in adult learning has obviously dropped in recent years to roughly 33%, the lowest participation rate in decades. How will you get participation increasing again during your term



as Minister?

Gillian Keegan: The things that we have set out today are very much focused on trying to enable that, giving an entitlement to level 3 to every adult. Up to now it was capped at 19 to 23 year-olds, and obviously 16 to 18 year-olds have a full offer. If you were over 23 today—if you were 24 today—you could not access that, apart from via a loan, and it is something that has not really taken off. Making sure this capability is there and then making the loans much easier and chunking them into more bite-size chunks for those higher levels, going on to level 4 and 5, is the announcement we have made today. That is what we are going to deliver, which hopefully will change those numbers.

Q102 **Christian Wakeford:** Looking into one of Ian's questions earlier, about roughly a third of employers not providing any training, some of the feedback from that study said that one of the boundaries for providing training was having a good local provider. What is the Department doing, working across Government with BEIS, for example, to make sure that we are working with providers across the country to make sure that boundary is no longer there?

Gillian Keegan: Obviously that means two-thirds of employers in this country are investing in training. As I say, my personal experience working for 30 years in various industries is that they take training and investment seriously. But on your point for those that do not, and access to training providers, there has been a revolution in training providers in this country. Obviously we have FE colleges all over the country, we have institutes of technology now that are being rolled out, we have national colleges, but we also have the independent training providers, who have grown to service the apprenticeship market as well, to make sure that they react to local needs. Therefore I think we do have a market that can adapt to local needs and we need to make sure that we help SMEs on this journey to invest in training and more apprenticeships as well.

Q103 **Christian Wakeford:** I agree with the majority of what you said. I just think, as we have gone through Covid, some of those independent providers have certainly struggled and some have even gone under. However, I will move on.

In the words of the Secretary of State, participation in adult further education has also “plummeted” from 3.1 million in 2010-11 to 2.1 million in 2018-19. Are the reasons understood well by the Department?

Gillian Keegan: I think the reasons are. Access to a free entitlement at that level is something that obviously has impacted numbers, with people having to take loans for various things and also at the same time having the apprenticeship system on offer. The apprenticeship system was possibly easier to access and that was something that was introduced and ramped up over the period. Obviously from an apprenticeship viewpoint, you get paid to do your training and you know you are studying the right thing because an employer is guiding you. That is quite a compelling



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offer, so I would imagine that some of the learning has been moved over there.

But clearly the announcement today is meant to make sure that whether you have a job, whether you are looking to return to work after you have had a family or whether you are looking to switch careers, all of those offers are available for you. That is why I think level 3 entitlement is very important and I am sure it will be welcomed by the sector.

Q104 Christian Wakeford: I completely agree with the training aspect. That is why I have taken on two apprentices myself in my office recently.

When you talk about loans and removing some of these barriers it is a fantastic headline, but there are certainly areas like the north-west where some of the jobs markets are collapsing. I am thinking specifically about aviation and aerospace, where normally we would look to put quite a few apprentices or trades into that sector. What are we doing to alleviate that pressure for a sector that, quite frankly, is failing and does need a lot more help? Is there anything further that can be done by the Department to overcome some of these more structural issues?

Gillian Keegan: Clearly coronavirus has had a massive impact, but also a very uneven impact. You have mentioned the aviation industry. Certain industries have seen their revenues plummet and it is clear that the restrictions, as we are all living with coronavirus, will massively impact them. It is not just in our country; it is the global impact of people not travelling as much at the moment. It has been uneven, because on the other hand you have anybody involved in food, technology, health and policing massively trying to recruit people. You do have skills shortages and shortages of people in some halves of the economy and then obviously this gap, which has all concertinaed into a couple of months. That is where we are trying to focus.

That is why we have come up with some of the shorter-term things like the Skills Toolkit and the digital boot camps—we will be looking to extend those across the country—trying to help people move from areas where it is going to take longer to recover and where maybe the job that they had may no longer be there, to be able to transfer those skills and move them over. This has accelerated a decline of some sectors as well, which we were on already, but which has very much quickened.

We have an airport very close to me in the area I represent. There is a lot of focus being put on mental health, for example. We need loads more people in mental health and they are working very closely to offer opportunities to those people who have been made redundant at the airport.

Q105 Apsana Begum: Hi, Minister. My question is around digital skills. The new entitlement to digital skills is not accompanied by additional funding. It is good to see the introduction of the initiatives such as the low wage scheme, but what assessment have the Government made of whether to



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provide additional funding or an actual funding commitment to digital skills?

Gillian Keegan: Obviously if anybody was in any doubt before, nobody has any doubt that digital skills are absolutely vital. Certainly during this period with coronavirus we have all had to rely on them and some of us have had a very fast course in how to deal with this.

There are a number of ways that you can access digital skills. The first is the Skills Toolkit—online, free and available with beginner, intermediate and advanced courses, helping people get more comfortable online. As you say, we have introduced the entitlement for everybody to have basic digital skills training within college as well. That is something we introduced as of August. We have more Skills Toolkit courses being announced today, which will broaden the access as well. Then we have digital boot camps, which for some people, depending where you are up to on that journey, will be there to help you get proficient so that you can use these skills in the workplace. There is a huge focus on digital and I expect that will continue because that is one of the things that we know is a must. There is no business across this country now, pretty much, that is not digital in some way, shape or form.

Q106 **Apsana Begum:** Is there an estimate in terms of how many adults you are expecting to take up the new digital skills entitlement in 2020-21?

Gillian Keegan: I do not have that. I am sure they have done estimates for the budget, but I do not have that number with me. I can get that number to you if it is available. As many as possible. I think there will be a huge demand because people were putting off some of these things before. Perhaps they could get around it in a different way or there were still some services available that they could use face-to-face. One of the things that coronavirus has done is that it has meant that everybody understands the power of digital. Even to talk to your relatives has been enabled through digital. We expect demand to grow.

Q107 **Apsana Begum:** I think data are important. We know about 11.9 million adults, according to the Learning and Work Institute evidence, lack digital skills and there are also regional disparities. For example, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority estimate that between one-quarter and one-fifth of Greater Manchester's adult population lack essential digital skills. Therefore it would be good if the Department could, at some point, share some data intelligence around that so we can understand that a bit more as a Committee. Thank you.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, and you are absolutely right in terms of regional disparities. There are massive regional disparities in terms of productivity and skills. The more that we can understand that, the more that we can target our offer and make sure that people feel confident enough to take that first step. That is often what holds people back. Hopefully we have a broad enough offer, but absolutely we will not stop until we have made



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sure everyone has access to that digital skills training because it is essential.

Q108 Kim Johnson: Minister, your announcement today intends to increase the number of adults taking level 4 and 5 qualifications. Is the Department considering maintenance grants to raise participation in level 3 to 5 courses funded by Advanced Learner Loans?

Gillian Keegan: In terms of the Advanced Learner Loans, obviously you get access to the loans and I think you can get access to a maintenance grant loan as well, but most of the grants are dealt with through the bursary funding arrangements that are available. No, we will not be going back to a sort of maintained grant kind of system. It is following the student loan system. What we are trying to do is to make it easier to digest, to make those courses shorter, make the loans and the cost of them lower so that people can take one and then move on to the next one, which I think is quite an important part of it.

Also if people are in full-time work they can access them as well. They can access them part-time, which is what used to happen a lot. I remember the way I did it and that was certainly the way lots of people got on. When there were many more people doing level 4 and 5, it was usually people who were in work, who were looking to be able to do this in the evenings and in their own time. We need to make sure that it is flexible enough.

Q109 Kim Johnson: Thanks, Minister. That follows on to my next question, because there is a need to make post-18 funding more flexible so that adults can learn on a modular basis and not choose between work and study. Do you believe that your announcement today allows this to happen and do you have any plans to speed up the introduction and expansion of T Level provision to help with the anticipated rise in youth unemployment?

Gillian Keegan: Thank you so much for mentioning T Levels. T Levels are an absolutely fundamental part of, first of all, bringing the employer-led standards into qualifications so that young people get, as Ian said, on the careers path much more easily and are starting to learn things that are highly valuable in the workplace. We started this year with 44 providers with three initial T Levels. I think we are growing that to 68 and seven T Levels next year and then we will be rolling them out fully across the country by 2023-24. That is the period.

There was a lot of pressure to delay T Levels. Obviously introducing a new qualification in the middle of coronavirus is difficult and we were a bit unsure about aspects of that, but we decided it is so important to start this reform, this revolution in our technical education so that young people can start. If you go to a college and see the T Levels, it is absolutely amazing what they are learning, how technical and up-to-date it is and how quickly they are learning these skills. They have only been



at it for two weeks. I completely agree, they are a vital pillar to offer our young people.

Q110 Chair: I think Kim was asking in terms of the flexible learning, ie that the train is going to the destination, but you can hop on and off at regular intervals and it all builds up in the same way. Is that right, Kim?

Kim Johnson: Yes, that is correct.

Gillian Keegan: Yes. That is what we are trying to do in terms of the modular learning. Obviously we have to set out how these things are going to work together with apprenticeships, full-time learning and T Levels. The great thing about it is that they are all built on the same employer-led standards and that will be the thread that goes right the way through. It is quite a good system because it is organic as well, because obviously as employers update their understanding of what the latest systems are or the latest equipment or technology, that will be fed in through the Institute. That is what has given us the confidence to invest more in FE than we ever have before, because we are confident that it will lead to good job outcomes.

In reply to your earlier question—I have looked it up in my notes—the advanced bursary system is about £46.5 million.

Q111 Dr Caroline Johnson: In terms of the Individual Learning Accounts, Minister, the courses that one can sit in Scotland are limited to those that are aligned to Scotland's labour market strategy, where they feel the needs are for their workforce to be trained. Are there plans to do that in England? If there are, where do you think the specific needs are in the workforce at the moment?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, the intention is to focus on those courses that can lead to closing a skills gap or a good job and career outcome. That is the labour market input. However, if you look across the country at the amount of areas where we do have skills gaps, and that is not just geographical locations but in terms of sectors, it is very broad and very wide. As I said before, it is anything from teaching, policing, nursing, health and social care, construction, engineering, anything to do with green jobs, science, data and digital. There is an almost unending list of areas where we do have some quite significant skills shortages. They will be quite broad in terms of the range of occupations and sector areas, but they are focused on those areas where we do see skills shortages as opposed to those where potentially there is not large growth in terms of jobs in the future.

Q112 Chair: In terms of apprenticeships, where are the Government at in meeting the 2.3% apprenticeship target by March 2021? Are the data going to be readily published and how are the public bodies going to be held to account?

Gillian Keegan: Yes, we are on target for that. I did have the figures here, but we are absolutely on target for that and we have been stepping



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up making sure that that is a key focus because obviously that is something we can do ourselves. We will be publishing those figures.

Chair: That is across all public bodies?

Gillian Keegan: Yes.

Chair: We would be grateful if you could let the Committee have those details.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, will do.

Q113 **Chair:** Do you think that it might be worthwhile setting a more ambitious apprenticeship goal for the public sector? For example, if the public sector were to hire 50,000 new members of staff a year and the target was increased by 5 percentage points each year, you could end up with 4,000 new apprenticeships in 2021 and over 11,000 a year by 2024. Why not increase the target to 5%?

Gillian Keegan: We can look at that idea. I am all for trying to get more apprentices. Also there is obviously an incentive for people to use their levy money, but I think the most important thing is to make sure that we have the system working in those areas where we have massive skills gaps. We have done a lot of work with the NHS, for example, with the Ambulance Service, to make sure that we have all the levels of apprenticeship standards available so that they can start to utilise their levy money.

Q114 **Chair:** Do you think the target should be increased? If you are meeting the 2.3% target and you are going to show us those figures, do you think it could be increased?

Gillian Keegan: It depends where we have the standards and where we have the gaps. I would probably go for a more targeted approach personally, but it is certainly something we will look at and keep under review. If the focus is to try to increase the number of apprentices across the public sector, then absolutely I agree with that.

Q115 **Chair:** Do you think public sector procurement contracts should be conditional on the number of apprentices the candidate for that procurement employs?

Gillian Keegan: That probably would be harder to administer than what we would get back in return, but we have been talking about the 5% Club and supporting the 5% Club, which is where there is this desire for employers to focus on making sure that they can try to recruit more apprentices, up to 5% of their—

Q116 **Chair:** If a company wants a Government contract, why should you not make it a condition that they should employ apprentices, given that is such a strategic aim of the Government to have more apprentices?



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Gillian Keegan: Obviously that is not my role, that is the role of the Cabinet Office, I think, in terms of the procurement and the contracts, but—

Chair: Yes, but you might have a view on it.

Gillian Keegan: I do have a view on it, but I am sure there are many, many views on what you should put in a Government contract to make sure that you get an outcome for many different Departments. In general, the most important thing is that I think most businesses have bought into the power of the apprenticeship system, particularly now we have worked very closely together to make the standards work. We have to make progression more visible through the apprenticeship system and that is something I have asked the Institute to look at, but in general I think most people have bought into that. We just need to make sure the system works well and flexibly enough for them.

Q117 **Chair:** In terms of the institutes of technology—you briefly mentioned them—what is the timeframe? You published your prospectus in February this year, I think, and said that the competition would launch later in the year. What is the timetable and how many do you plan to be built?

Gillian Keegan: Are you talking specifically about the institutes of technology, the wave 2?

Chair: Yes.

Gillian Keegan: In wave 1 we have 12, of which nine are working today, and the other three are coming onstream. In wave 2 we have eight more, which will be spread around. One of the criteria is that it has to be representing an area that does not already have an institute of technology so that we can get—

Q118 **Chair:** Yes. When will the competition be launched for wave 2?

Gillian Keegan: I think in the autumn is when we are planning to launch that competition.

Chair: Autumn as in before Christmas?

Gillian Keegan: Autumn is usually before Christmas, I think, but hopefully—

Chair: Yes, but autumn has a very elasticated definition when it comes to Whitehall.

Gillian Keegan: Yes. Some things have obviously been slowed down, but this is a big area of investment. We have spent £290 million on IoTs. Kim was talking about level 4 and 5. IoTs are going to be the place where there is going to be a huge focus on level 4 and 5.

Q119 **Chair:** Do you want them to be very closely linked to FE colleges where they are in the relevant places?



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Gillian Keegan: The way the structure works for an IoT is it is FE colleges working with universities, working with leading employers, and the three of them have to put a bid together. By design, they all have that collaboration in them, which is what I think is going to make them super strong. I went to a cybersecurity one the other day where they are doing degree apprenticeships for cybersecurity. It is amazing the opportunities that the institutes of technology can give to young people.

Q120 **Chair:** Before I bring in my colleagues Kim and Ian, just to end, you will be pleased to know, I know we talked a lot about adult community learning at the beginning, but it might be helpful if you make some kind of speech or set out what your position is in terms of supporting adult community learning. However welcome the announcements are today—personally I think they are very good indeed—that is very different and we are talking about very different things. I think it would be quite good, given that there has not been a strategy paper since the very early days of the coalition Government, for you or the Department for Education to set out its position on supporting adult community learning.

Gillian Keegan: Yes, I think that is a good point. The only comment I would make is that everything we are doing is to support adult learners in the community. Everything we are doing is to support that cohort of people, no matter where they are, at what stage, what basic needs or what other needs they have, to help them into the labour market and help them get on in the labour market in an area where there are prospects and good jobs. That is what we are fully focused on.

Q121 **Kim Johnson:** Picking up a little bit on apprenticeships, could you clarify if the 12-week rule for finding an apprentice another job following redundancy will be reviewed and increased in those sectors that have been seriously impacted by Covid-19? Because 12 weeks is not an awful lot of time in this climate to find a new job.

Gillian Keegan: We have been focused on a number of things to help with apprenticeships during the uncertainty of coronavirus. The first thing is we moved everything online or we asked everybody to move things online as much as possible and a lot of the training continued. Obviously apprentices were also permitted to be furloughed and they could carry on training while they were under furlough. If you are made redundant and have less than six months left or you are on a longer apprenticeship and are 75% of your way through, we will support you to continue your training.

If you are outside that and you are earlier in your apprenticeship, we help with this matching service and we spend 12 weeks trying to help you get another option so that you continue your training. If that does not happen and you cannot get another opportunity, then what we have asked all training providers to provide is a partial learner record so that a learner can take what they have already done and then when the market picks up a bit they can transfer what they have already done on to a new apprenticeship. We are trying to do that as much as possible.



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I have asked them recently to look into whether it makes a difference if we increase it from 12 weeks to 16 weeks or 20 weeks. Clearly it can make a difference to the training provider, but in terms of the jobs and whether that changes with coronavirus—the same as we have said about the furlough scheme and now the job support package—it does not, because in the short term it is still very difficult to find those jobs.

After saying that, on the matchmaking service that we have set up there are 400 employers now with vacancies, very good quality vacancies. We are matching redundant apprentices, of which there has not been a huge number yet, but of course we do not know what is going to happen with the end of furlough and so on. We are trying to make sure we are there so that people can complete their apprenticeship or take the value of it and help match them to another job offer. It is the absolute focus. Of course we have the £2,000 apprenticeship incentive scheme, which has only just started, which hopefully will also lead to an increase in numbers and incentivise people to make that decision to take on an apprentice.

Ian Mearns: I will just point out to the Minister that the sun crossed the equator last week, so we are now into autumn officially.

Gillian Keegan: That is not the DfE's autumn, I am sure.

Chair: That is what I was alluding to when I asked if it would be before Christmas. Did you have a question, Ian, or was that it?

Ian Mearns: That is it.

Chair: What a lovely way to end. Can I thank you, Minister, for thorough answers and also for the announcement today, which I think is great news? I look forward to working with you and hearing from you in the future. Thank you.