



HOUSE OF LORDS

Education for 11-16 Year Olds Committee

Roundtable meeting with teachers

Thursday 14 September 2023

GROUP 2

Lord Knight of Weymouth: What I'd like to do is just to start with very brief introductions of everyone present. I'm Jim. I was once, a very long time ago, schools Minister. I also chair a multi-academy trust, E-Act, and do various things in education. Robert, you've already introduced yourself but have you got anything to add?

Lord Mair: No, no, nothing, more to add.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: And Jo, you've introduced yourself.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone: Yes.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Participant A?

Participant A: Hello, I'm Participant A. I'm head teacher at a school in north London and I'm a secondary school teacher.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: OK, let's pass over to Participant B.

Participant B: Good morning everyone. My name's Participant B. I'm a regional director of science and I work for a trust in Yorkshire and Humber.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Very good. Participant C?

Participant C: My name is Participant C. I'm deputy head teacher in charge of outcomes across my school.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Terrific, welcome. Participant D?

Participant D: Hello, I'm Participant D. I am head of history at a secondary school. I spend three days of my week running the history department and then two days of my week at Birmingham University helping support the ITE trainees.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: The initial teacher education, very good. And Participant E?

Participant E: My name's Participant E. I'm from a trust and I lead on our bespoke curriculum, which is all about applied learning.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Oh interesting. We'll look forward to hearing more about that. Participant F?

Participant F: Good morning. My name's Participant F. I am a computing and careers leader, at a secondary academy in Cambridge.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Participant G?

Participant G: Hi. I'm Participant G. I'm director of education at a large special school. I oversee the curriculum from early years to post-16 and supported internships which is part of my role. I'm also an RE and sociology teacher as well by trade.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Good. Let's kick off with our first question. Probably raising the hand is the polite way to answer, but if you're impassioned just pitch in. How satisfied are you with the curriculum for key stages 3 and 4 in your subject, assuming that that is relevant as subject teachers. Who wants to kick us off? Participant F?

Participant F: I'm a teacher of computing. In key stage 3 I do like the national curriculum. It's not overly prescriptive; it does give schools a good amount of flexibility to teach skills that are relevant for their local area, which is fantastic. We're in Cambridge, we've got quite a lot of tech companies around us, and we work with a few of those on developing our curriculum and what we're going to be delivering to our students. So the key stage 3 curriculum is fantastic in computing for that reason.

I find though when it comes to GCSE, because of the some of the challenges of how you assess computing effectively, when the new curriculum came out for GCSE, initially there was lots of coursework but then there was found to be some cheating of students just putting model answers on the internet. So it then went straight into assessments where students have to programme on paper which creates complexity because you don't get the feedback from the computer in the same way that you would otherwise. The students write code on paper, which is a very unusual way of assessing a digital subject, and you lose some of the help features that are there available for professionals. So I find the GCSE bizarrely a bit harder than it is to actually code in practice just because of the way that we currently assess it.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. Just a follow up, Participant F. You said that in key stage 3 there's a lot of flexibility. Does that mean you're thinking that in key stage 4, beyond that particular weird problem around paper, there a

sense that there is too much content that you have to get through, or is the flexibility still there at key stage 4?

Participant F: I find when teaching GCSE computer science in particular, the national curriculum does overlap quite helpfully with key stage 4 so you do take those skills further. But actually if they've had a good key stage 3 provision it is much easier taking that step into GCSE. The difference between GCSE and A level I think is the cliff edge in computing. I don't teach it at my current school but I have done historically. There is a larger leap between GCSE and A level just in terms of the types of programming that are assessed.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thanks very much. Participant C?

Participant C: Within our trust and within the school, you know, we're valued in how much curriculum time we get. I'm not sure if that's the case across the nation. At key stage 3 there is flexibility in the activities and what we can do and how that's implemented throughout the curriculum from years 7 to 9. I think in terms of curriculum time, we're getting enough from the trust point of view, but when you've got, you know, the national problems such as obesity and mental health, how PE and sport can have a positive effect on these areas, I think there's certainly a question around improving that kind of thing.

Two things have always been a massive problem for us, especially in the area we are in, in Bradford, a white working class school. From my perspective the curriculum now at key stage 4 has become very become very elitist, very elitist indeed, which has become really challenging and unrealistic for our students. For example, in the old curriculum, the old specification in the previous government, you used to be able to get assessed as a performer, a coach, an official, an analyst, all the areas of sport, all the important areas where we need more people in sport. Now they've narrowed it down to just performance.

The list of activities and the list of sports has been cut massively, and we're in a situation now where health related exercise, a really key point in terms of reducing obesity levels, has been removed. Lots of activities like that have been removed. The curriculum still allows for fishing, golf, sailing, rowing and equestrian. Now not many of our schools have got a rowing boat or a horse, I can tell you that. So it's just narrowed what we can do massively, it's just taken that away. And now the performance levels have gone up. We've had to remove the GCSE from the curriculum altogether and we're now running BTEC sport because it certainly suits our students more in terms of what the outcomes that they actually receive there. So there are difficulties within our trust and within our area.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you Participant C, that's really helpful. Participant A?

Participant A: I'm a drama teacher, so my first gripe is the fact that we've got a curriculum that doesn't take the arts into account, and that's had an absolutely significant impact on parental perspectives and what they're encouraging their children to do. The arts definitely have a lower value in their minds than what other subjects like history, geography and languages have. We know that we are an economy that's got a huge creative industry. We need creative people to go into the world, we need problem solvers, we need imagination. And yet that's being wiped off the curriculum at some great length. When you look at the decline in entries at the moment in arts subjects, especially in places like drama, it is absolutely significant.

Not only are we battling with that, but then we've got the battle between GCSEs and vocational education. Vocational education is not currently being promoted in the same way as academic qualifications. Again, we're battling with the parental and student impressions that vocational education is not seen as academically at the same level as GCSEs, even though it's the more industry based hands on learning that children really really get encouraged by, because they want to be able to see what they're learning, how that actually leads them into industry and employment. At key stage 3 in drama I think we have a great curriculum and that's because it is not prescriptive. In the national curriculum we have got about three lines that come under the English umbrella, and what that means is we have flexibility to tailor our curriculum in the way that we think is fit for purpose and that we are able to meet the needs of our children. We can add diversity into the text that we explore, moments of theatre history, world history, global history, and it's fantastic because we're not governed by a significant amount of content that is just being, you know, given to us. We've got the autonomy to do that.

However, in key stage 4 GCSE, for a subject where children want to do it because it's a practical subject, 70% of it is a written terminal examination. So we spend the majority of our time teaching our young people how to write essays and how to answer exam questions, and because that takes such a long time they are absolutely missing out on what is the gift of drama and performance, which is the performance element to it.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: What difference does that make to the engagement of the young people themselves with your subject?

Participant A: We try and make it as practical as possible, but there are times when they just get so stressed out because they've got to learn to write for an exam, and actually it takes away their ability to create because you are teaching them on how to answer questions so that they can get those grades, and that takes away the enjoyment of it. Why have we got a GCSE that's 70% exam, written?

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you, that's very helpful. Participant D?

Participant D: So in history at key stage 3 the curriculum is fairly un-prescriptive, but it's still, particularly for the cohort that we've got—we draw from across Birmingham—very white is probably the easiest way of putting it. We went through an Ofsted inspection recently and history was deep dived and we had a really interesting conversation with the inspector about the national curriculum being seen as the basis and then if you want to add in other topics to do with other aspects of history that aren't on it, the more effective way is to bolt on top of it. So that's one thing, actually making the curriculum more representative and looking at different cultures and where peoples come from is quite hard.

For key stage 4, I want to pull from what Participant A said in that our school has very much gone down the lines of we've got to think it's 70 odd percentage of students now doing the EBacc, and so they do either history or geography, and with the GCSE I feel that I'm letting down our students who are less academically able. So the GCSE in history, before 2015 we had three units, now we've got five units. So the content has ballooned and it feels really bad on results day when you've got students who are getting grades 1 and 2 who you know that if they weren't trying to learn so much material that actually they might get a higher grade. So it feels like I'm cutting those students off.

The second thing is that in the curriculum there is so much material I have to learn and the exam questions are structured in such a way that you require very specific knowledge. Years ago OCR developed a pilot, I think in 2005 or 2006, a pilot vocational history qualification that was tested and then nothing ever happened with it. That was really good in that it was vocational. But I also miss the history coursework. Controlled assessment was a nightmare, but it actually got students to really explore what history is like, and at A level it works really well.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thanks, Participant D. We'll come back to the coursework question if we have time. Participant B?

Participant B: I'm a science teacher and I'm a director of science, so I build the curriculum for 27 schools. I get the opportunity to go into 27 schools and have a look and see how the science curriculum develops within them. In terms of key stage 3 and key stage 4, there's definitely a dichotomy within that. In key stage 3, as people have already mentioned, there is great flexibility within that, and actually we've developed our own curriculum based upon the national curriculum that allows for greater flexibility and intrigue and wonder. You spoke about engagement, I don't see much engagement because there's a lot of prescriptive learning of facts and I think that's what's coming through a lot and that's

travelled down into key stage 3 in particular due to the pressures that have been put on through the GCSE and key stage 4.

Now for science there are two pathways: you can do the triple science route and you can do the combined science route. We used to have a vocational route through the BTEC but that's all gone. So all students, regardless of ability, must take this GCSE pathway. Within that we've already created a further dichotomy in that the most able students go and do triple science, and the students who aren't so able do combined science. That for me feels very wrong. It's not science for all at all. I do understand the reasons why they first came about. I think we're talking about the mid to late 2000s in terms of why that was, because we wanted to push the STEM education, but it's not facilitating all students.

Accessibility for all students towards science is not there, and actually most students are very much turned off because they are learning rote biology, chemistry and physics. They're learning a multitude of facts very similar to history, and they are tested upon 18 to 20% of those facts in a 100% all game exam at the end. When you talk about science and when you talk about what you want in science, we want to talk about new technologies, military developments, medical cures, space travel, but that's all gone. The fact that you can learn science at key stage 4 and most students will not learn anything about space is slightly criminal. But that's because it's not required. So there needs to be a rethink on whether one route for science is the way forward. I'm an advocate of having one route and the curriculum needs to, I believe, represent one room, whether it be combined science for all or whether it be biology, chemistry, physics for all. I think there needs to be some sort of movement towards that.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you, that's really interesting and helpful. Participant E?

Participant E: I suppose I'm coming from the perspective of someone who doesn't teach a single subject anymore. I have taught every subject at key stage 2 or key stage 3 at some point in my career, but I think we have a very knowledge rich curriculum where there's little space for skills development and a lack of creativity or problem solving, and a very rigid division of subjects. We've created space in our curriculum for children to experience learning through interdisciplinary assignments or projects, and alongside learning knowledge and skills, they learn the skills for life as well. So that is something that we are developing quite strongly in our trust's schools.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Participant G, you're up.

Participant G: I'm not going to kind of reiterate everything. Just from an RE perspective, very similar concerns around the fact that key stage 3 obviously is delegated to the local boroughs so you have freedom around what your teach, but at key stage 4 it becomes a lot more rigid. And I was going to talk a little bit though from my experience having been a deputy head for a long time in a secondary mainstream school, moving into the SEN world as I am now, what you can see is within the SEN world there is more flexibility at key stage 4 than there is within the mainstream sector to design curriculums that meet the needs of the students, and those students could be sitting in mainstream schools not having that flexibility. But what we've been able to design is a curriculum where we really think about each individual and we can talk about vocational skills, we can talk about academic subjects. We really fit it around each individual child because we're not completely hit by those accountability measures in the same way. Seeing it from both sides is something I'm really passionate about, trying to think about how we get that back into the other system because it's not meeting the need for students.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you, Participant G. I think I get the same message from alternative provision schools as well. So, the next question is: how valued do you feel your subject is within the current secondary education system? Who wants to start us off? Participant D?

Participant D: History feels very valued. Actually, it's overvalued. I feel really ashamed that I was heading up here for eight years and it's sort of pushed out the arts, it's pushed out creative subjects and it's unfair that the EBacc and accountability is driving it and is devaluing it in the minds of parents and students and it's not fair. Yes, history is great and I think history is the best thing ever, but students should have a broad curriculum and do what they're interested in, not be forced into things they might not want to do or are not suited to do.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you, Participant D. And that in a way allows me to combine the next question in with this question. How valued do you feel your subject is, and what's the impact of the EBacc and accountability measures on what happens in 11 to 16? You've kind of answered both questions, Participant D, so let's allow everybody else to do the same. Participant G?

Participant G: Just to follow on from that, yes, history is very important. But for sociology and as an RE teacher, I spent too many years talking to students who wanted to take both but have been forced into one. I've seen so many students go through those subjects and be really successful, go on to top universities and have great careers that it doesn't seem a fair balance. I've probably touched on the accountability measures earlier in my previous answer,

I guess. I don't want to spend too much time on that. I see there's other people who want to contribute.

But that focus on EBacc really damages other subjects, and I completely agree with what Participant A said earlier about the creative subjects as well. It has had a massive impact on the breadth that we can offer at key stage 4 for students, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, those that need more time, really drilling into subjects. So you've seen that massively impact what is on offer for those students over the past few years.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Let me just push back to help others think about the EBacc. We've heard people who are defending the EBacc say to us, 'yeah, but hang on a minute, you have to do English and maths, those are really core subjects, and then STEM is really important, we've got to do some science and a language is really important, you're going to do a language and the humanities are really important, but there's only so much time in the school day and there are only so many teachers with so many specialisms that we can recruit and so it's just an inevitability, and you've still got the freedom to do these other things, but you're dealing with a limited amount of time and resource in the system and the EBacc is just inevitably the most important subjects'. What do you say to that, Participant G?

Participant G: It creates a hierarchy of knowledge and as a sociologist, we know about how you can completely compartmentalise knowledge and therefore you can create and you can divide people by saying, 'this knowledge is more important than other knowledge'. So I think ingraining that into children is a very dangerous thing to do so early on in their lives. So while absolutely all subjects are important, the level that you go into in English and the text, the amount of time that is drilled in to that, is it because they're learning more or is it because they're being drilled into a particular exam format? My knowledge from English is that it's actually getting them ready for exams so they're not able to be creative even in English.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Okay. Participant F?

Participant F: Computer science is obviously very respected as being an EBacc subject. I think there is something, particularly in key stage 4 where ICT drips away into the side-lines. I think there's a misconception that because everyone knows how to use devices like tablets or mobile phones, that everyone can use a computer. And actually, with the drive to recruit more people into computer science—obviously a very important set of skills, and obviously a big driver of the economy—actually that standard of 'do people know how to use a computer anymore?', because we're driving students towards GCSE computer science and, same with every other subject, there is a temptation to make your key stage 3

the preparation for GCSE, where does the ability to use a standard laptop or desktop computer come from?. In my time as a teacher, when you've got newer teachers coming through the system, actually people doing the training, people doing their ECT years, their ability to use a computer is significantly inferior to previous generations because it's just not been taught.

Participant B: I have a slightly different take on everything. I think the EBacc is fairly important, and I think actually, science is not important enough. Considering where science will lead in terms of career aspirations in particular—you can talk about all the science career routes that you can go through—one of my biggest concerns is that the progress and accountability measures doubly impact all of our subjects regardless of whether they're creative or not because of the double weighting English and maths have. Now there are already accountability measures for English and maths because you have the English and maths grade 4 plus and grade 5 plus measures, that are measures the schools use. So to have then another measure, i.e. Progress 8 where you double weight English and maths, you've got a doubling of the doubling of measures for English and maths and what happens is that schools will overemphasise curriculum hours on English and maths to the detriment of other subjects.

Science, in particular, gets caught out. I know that for myself if I wanted to teach triple science, I would effectively require nine hours. I never get nine hours, and that is because English and maths are taking my hours because of their double weighting. You know, I'm talking honestly now in terms of how most schools will work with their curriculum, and so for English and maths, to get that Progress 8 and to get that EBacc measure, their curriculum hours will be overemphasised to make sure that they get that. Now if you were to just create that measure as every single subject counts as one then you kind of negate the importance of English and maths in that measure, which is a measure of the broad curriculum. You still have your grade 4 plus and grade 5 plus measure, which is a measure of your English and maths for the school, but it might allow for greater flexibility for schools, in particular to think, 'well actually I can take a risk with more subjects because they've all got equal weighting'. I'm not saying that's perfect.

Progress 8 I'm quite happy with as a measure, I think it's a much better measure than attainment ever was with grade 5 plus, because where you've got schools, particularly where you've got low APS when they're incoming, it always felt that the schools were failures. So actually Progress 8 kind of negates that to a certain extent. I'm not saying it's perfect. There are issues with it, but it does negate that and it gives you something to work with. Also it allows for people to make the judgments they require about the school in terms of how much progress the students are making. Still, science is valued, but possibly not

valued enough considering its importance, and I think that goes back to the idea of the combined and triple routes.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. Participant A?

Participant A: Like I said, I'm a drama teacher and what I find really interesting is, there's a huge global economy to do with the arts and industry and employment. We look at the impact on mental health that COVID had on our young people and how fantastic the arts are for helping our young people navigate through how they're feeling as well. And yet it's just not seen in the same vein. We talk about cultural capital, and we look at the outcomes and we look at how disadvantaged children across the entire country are performing less well when compared to their non-disadvantaged peers, and yet we're not encouraging all children to take the arts subjects. Going to the theatre is now considered an elitist kind of opportunity for young people because it's not a standardised expectation that every child in this country should be able to go to the theatre, go to the opera, go to a sporting event.

What happens is that the disadvantage gap gets bigger. So we haven't got cultural capital on the agenda for our young people. I've taken children to the theatre in year 12 and 13 who have never been to the theatre before. It has been their first time and it's like they are entering an absolute parallel universe. But the power of having young people on the train back from London, who stereotypically are your kids in the news that you see sometimes with hoods up and what have you, talking about Othello and Shakespeare is one of the reasons why I do this job. All children should have the opportunity to do that. So why are we not making it a statutory requirement to actually try and close that disadvantage gap for our young people?

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thanks Participant A. Participant C?

Participant C: I just want to make a quick point. I agree with a lot of things that have been said there. My job is effectively accountability measured in terms of outcomes across the school. But like I said before, I'm also a PE teacher so I've got to balance that with the faculty in terms of the importance of PE, sport and the creative arts and all these different subjects and what they bring to make a well-rounded individual. My personal opinion is that until we move away from Progress 8 and think of other ways how we can make accountability high but also make a level playing field, we're always going to have these problems. I certainly agree about the disadvantage gap and how that is getting larger and larger with the current accountability measures. Our accountability at key stage 4 is based on a test that kids do in year 6. The average score is the score against English and maths in an internal process and it's not reliable in my opinion. It's not reliable. We need to look at how we can keep accountability

high but also what are we doing in this course for students, for outcomes, for the future, for those who would go on to become doctors or dentists or whatever their chosen field is. We need to get away from this elitism in terms of the performance tables. I could go on forever about it.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you, Participant C. A point well made. Next question: so thinking about the school system for 11-16 year olds in general, how well does it equip young people with the skills you think that they will need for the future? Participant E.

Participant E: I don't think the school system actually does equip children for the skills of the future. It's very clear now that there is a skills gap in our country and, you know, employers are crying out for children that can communicate, collaborate, think critically and have empathetic skills. There's no space for that development within our current curriculum. And so it's rethinking how we do that in our current curriculum, in our current situation.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: And what you're doing in your multi academy trust is trying to push against that and try and deliver. But you're doing that within the current curriculum and you're doing that within the current accountability system. So some would argue and, you know when the schools Minister Nick Gibb came and gave evidence to the committee, he kind of argued, 'well, there's lots of flexibility and, you know, it's up to schools to use that'.

Participant E: But I think if we didn't have the constraints, we could do more. You know, the national curriculum does constrain what we can teach, and we are being quite innovative and thinking out-of-the-box and trying to do things within the system. But if those constraints weren't there, we could do a lot more. As we say, we teach children to think in a very interconnected way. We live in a global world with no divisions in subjects. So we try and teach children things that are relevant to them, things that they can connect to, and as a result, we've got greater engagement, our disadvantaged children, our PP, our SEND children thrive in this type of environment because it gives them an opportunity to speak up, to represent their views.

Our assessment methods are not about taking a test. We have a range of assessment methods to gauge the different skills that the children are demonstrating, but also assess the knowledge and learning that they're doing through those subjects. We're still working on it and we're getting better at it. But we have found it so important for the future that our children not only get these— We're in this system where they do have to sit exams. If there wasn't GCSEs it would be even better. But we do have that system. So we are preparing them to get good grades but we are all ensuring that they're going into the world to be able to get these jobs of the future that have not even been

created yet. It's these skills they have to be taught. A lot of people think they just organically develop as children go through the system; they don't. So we start in our primary schools where we're teaching children the ways people work at work, and as they go through the secondary system they get experiences of the real world through their learning. As a result of that we are getting greater engagement of children and they're seeing the value of what they're learning.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: As you're making these innovations, what's the reaction of the parents? Do they still want the kids to get the grades at GCSE? Or are they saying, 'actually we're willing to compromise a little on that if we get these rounded skills?' Or is that a false dichotomy?

Participant E: Our parents are really on board. Our parents actually like it. We invite our parents in to actually see the learning that the children are doing, so at the end of assignment, when they have to perform, you know, a scene from Romeo and Juliet in the Roman era or they're presenting to an audience, the parents come and see how their children are developing confidence, and we fully believe that if they go through the system with these skills of confidence, they will be able to be taught to take exams and pass them confidently at GCSE. GCSEs are just memorization and that can be done in a lot less curriculum time than we're devoting currently to examinations.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. I applaud your risk-taking appetite. Participant A?

Participant A: We're putting in something similar in a mainstream school, because I think it does need to be on the curriculum. So just before I get to that, I think work experience is also something that schools and children really, really value. However, the cost of work experience means that— I know that in one borough most secondary schools have cut that out of their curriculum because on average it costs between £10,000 and £15,000 a year to get a year group of children out to employers for a week. But that is one part of the year that children absolutely love in year 10 because they love being formal, dressing up, going out into industry. We have some fantastic reports from children who managed to do that. We've kept that on our curriculum because we think it's important. We're navigating our budget to be able to do that, and children do want to learn about life skills. They're really interested in money management, how to get a mortgage, what a bank account looks like, how to do that on a day-to-day basis. We've got a lot of single parent families where money is a massive, massive issue, as is poverty, and we've got children that want to earn money to make their quality of life better.

I do believe there should be life skills and enrichment, and I believe it so much that every Thursday afternoon on our school curriculum is an 'enrichment for all'

programme where every single member of staff is in charge of a group of children, that is all about teaching life skills and development. So I have got children setting up school businesses; I've got children who will be setting up a school garden to grow fruit and vegetables where other children will cook them in the canteen with our chef; I have got an apprentice team that is going to go around with our site care team to paint classrooms and to get the environment sorted. Every two weeks there is hands-on experience of what they are doing. Our parents are absolute advocates of that and it's something that I think we need to be doing.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Brilliant, Participant A. So doesn't that mean the system works?

Participant A: No, it doesn't mean the system works because I've actually cut down some of my curriculum time in my subject areas to actually put that on. Yes, we've got accountability measures, but also I see the needs of the children in my school. It is a risk because I can't actually say at this point what the impact on my outcomes is going to be. But I know I'm going to have children who are more ready to go into the world of work and employment once they actually get there, because they've had all of these opportunities.

Participant C: Sorry. Can I ask where you cut your curriculum time?

Participant A: Yeah, we had five one hour periods. We have reduced that to 50 minute lessons. So we have six periods in a day. Where, for example, option subjects had six one hour lessons they have now got five 50 minute lessons. So our planning needs to be more succinct; everything needs to be more succinct. But I'm hoping that some of what they're doing in those enrichment classes is learning, you know— I've got science experiments going on. They're going to be doing science experiments and soil collections today, and part of that they'll be able to take into some of their science lessons, for example, and kind of use that when they get to that curriculum time. So it is a risk.

Participant C: But still no particular subject in there?

Participant A: No, everybody's got a little bit less time.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thanks Participant A. Participant G?

Participant G: It's a shame that we have to talk about it as a risk. I guess that would be my first point, listening to everybody else, it shouldn't be a risk. It should be something we're able to invest in. And I think from my perspective it's just a fact that it's so fragmented, just the fact there's no sort of centralised kind of approach to how schools put this on. It means if you're lucky and you're able to be a bit innovative and take risks, you have that opportunity. We're able to do that. We have a supported internship with a big structure of work, coaches and

job coaches. We have a whole team who are able to therefore drive through our curriculum work experience, vocational opportunities, the whole way down, and because that really has an impact for our learners they're able to go out and have authentic experiences from aged 14. But it's built all the way down to our early years curriculum. I know that's not available as a resource for every school because they have to think about different budgets and we really need to think about that.

The second thing which I guess doesn't really work for this committee, because if we're only talking about children up to the age of 16 is that unfortunately, because we are talking so much about key stage 4 which is two years, actually fundamentally, is that a long enough period of time to do what we want to do? And I think that for me, if we were to have more, we're talking here about 14 to 19 year olds, then we'd be able to think much longer term and give more time and go deeper with the things we want to do with our students and our learners so they are more prepared for the world of work.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. Do you think we need GCSEs?

Participant G: I'm not sure we do. No, I think they are potentially outdated and I think that they are not fit for purpose and I think we need to be radical now with what we're going to do to move the system forward.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. Participant F?

Participant F: I'm picking up on what a few people have already said, the fact that there's a risk and the fact that it comes down to very much an individual school or a trust approach. We've got a list of entitlements, so careers education opportunities, which include skill development, which every child in our trust has an entitlement to. That's only just been launched. Also, a list of competencies, so a list of employability skills that we will be teaching across the curriculum. So they'll be starting to appear in other subjects. That's our approach.

But again, I don't think skills development sits high enough on the agenda. Particularly when it comes to Ofsted, I know that personal development is one of the key judgments in an Ofsted inspection and therefore you have to do something beyond the classroom and academic subjects, but there isn't enough weighting for a school that maybe has slightly lower results but that has students who are absolutely life ready. We're in a position now where all universities are starting to look at whether grades are the only thing that matters. The University of Cambridge are starting to look particularly in terms of inclusion at bringing in people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Actually, the University of Cambridge isn't going to be a university that's going to be three A*s to get in anymore; they are looking at lowering that for the people with the right knowledge, the right skills and the right experiences, people who are

confident enough to have a conversation in an interview, and actually grades are going to stop being the big thing that drives their recruitment.

I think the school accountability measures actually, you know, if it costs more time to make sure students are life ready, and obviously that costs curriculum time and therefore you're not spending as much time teaching the individual subjects, therefore grades might be lower. But if students are life ready, less likely to be not in education, employment or training when they leave us, is that not better for the country than ending up with schools getting students with straight grade nines but with limited skills?

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thanks, Participant F. Jo, you've got your hand up. If it was a supplementary to something that's just been said then pitch in.

Lord Johnson of Marylebone: Yeah, thank you, Jim. It was really just to follow up on the comments around GCSEs and dissatisfaction with them. I wondered how colleagues felt about the decision by Latymer Upper to drop all GCSEs apart from English and maths and to create its own qualifications, thereby regaining, according to its calculations, a quarter of its teaching time by not following the GCSE timetable. Is this something which you would like to see happen in your respective schools?

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you, Jo. Can you please answer that question along with anything else that you are going to say, so Participant D?

Participant D: A few years ago I was an external examiner for an independent school, and then when we were looking at setting up our school, we were actually exploring whether it was possible in the state sector to do something like this school have done; they have got their own qualifications. In 2014 it was being kicked around, and we decided to go with GCSE just because it was the easier option.

It's interesting listening to lots of schools that do enrichment opportunities. So as a school, we've got a longer school day. We go from 8:30am in the morning till 4:15pm, five days a week, and within that it means that students have got enrichments, they can choose to do, they get the office to do that. Plus there's also two hours of enrichment a week where we've got a list of all the things that we think that children, by the time they're 16, should be able to do. Things like go to the cinema, know how to change the tyre of a car, all these sorts of things that we've gone through. We're lucky that because of the connection to the university and population we've managed to persuade businesses to actually let us go down there and take a class of students and have a go actually changing the tyre, what it's like, work experience. But it's things that schools are doing despite the system rather than because they have to. The only thing that does worry me is that if it becomes a thing that we have to do in schools then it

always seems like the things that we have to do are the things that we don't do as well. Lots of schools have a tick box list of what they have to do and just do it.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Yeah, and Participant D, just in respect of that independent school's decision, which is what Latymer Upper are doing, you looked at doing that but was it just too hard for you to do it?

Participant D: We were lucky because we have the university that we're really associated with. We looked at setting it up, but it then got into how would that affect accountability measures and how would that actually affect school funding? And that was being kicked around about the time we were also getting the school built. But the boat has sailed because we're now talking about if we were to go back to do that. It's really hard for a school to switch.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: How do you afford the longer school day? How do you afford to staff that?

Participant D: The university gives the school a pot of money, so we get money from the university each year that pay for all the kids to do the Duke of Edinburgh Award and stuff like that.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: OK. Participant E?

Participant E: Just responding to what Jo said about Latymer Upper because I was at the meeting when they actually went through the plans of how they're going to roll it out at an independent school. It's the private sector leading what could be a future for us, and the state sector is just constrained by the accountability, the measures that we have, that make us unable to do those kind of reforms. I think that GCSEs mean nothing. I think what these independent schools are doing is making sure the courses that they are replacing them with are preparing the children for A levels so that they can access those A levels and then enter the university system. I just think they're leading the way. There's a lot of change that needs to be done in the state sector before we are brave enough to be able to take that step.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: My impression is that they are also more exciting to teach because they're leaning into teacher's passions too. Participant G?

Participant G: To be honest, I think I'm pretty much going to say the same thing, so I won't reiterate anything apart from that absolutely it would be once again that the complexity of asking the state sector to all take a risk doesn't make sense. It needs to be something that is a decision, where things have been freed up so that we have the space to have the freedom to make those decisions ourselves, but also to ensure that students across the board are entitled to the same offer. So it shouldn't come down to luck that you live in a certain area

where you have a trust who is going to offer this opportunity. There is that risk there, it's great if you live near a particular school and you get the opportunity. There are certain schools that have those opportunities but there are not for others. If you're living in some areas you're not going to get that opportunity because the schools work very differently, if that makes sense?

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Yep, makes a lot of sense, thank you. Participant B?

Participant B: I think in terms of GCSEs there is some scope to change them. I do feel that perhaps the conversation needs to be down perhaps to the students. We work with a lot of students who are very disadvantaged, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and the areas that they work, and they aren't going on to A levels, they aren't going on to university, and you've got 40 to 50% not achieving a grade 4. What is there for them? You know, we're asking the question about school: how it equips young people with the skills. It's not. The system isn't equipping them with the skills. Instead, you know, you've got vast swathes of ex-mining communities with 30 to 40% not getting English and maths, not getting their science, no aspirations in terms of where they're going.

I don't mean to advertise anything, but we've embraced T levels because what we firmly believe is that for 16 to 19 we want to make sure that they're in local employment because that's the biggest driver that we can do as a school in our local area. So part of what we would want to see are courses like perhaps we used to have. In fact, you used to have GCSEs and vocational courses at 14 to 16, which enabled you to then allow those students to migrate into the local employment sector, not necessarily always say, 'well, the students who are going to get those A levels and get those seven pluses and go to Cambridge and so forth,' they will go there anyway. What I need to do is I need to look after the 60 to 70% who are going to stay in the local area, in Doncaster, in Scunthorpe, in Middlesbrough. I need to look after them.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: If the accountability measures of progress 8 were different, do you think you would teach more vocational and technical qualifications at key stage 4?

Participant B: Absolutely. And it wouldn't be for all. It would be for the 30 to 40% of students who we feel would feel a sense of achievement, that they're learning, that they're finding their way within the local employment sector so we can build those relationships back. We can't build a relationship back when we're saying a student has come out with a grade 2, but we could build a relationship back if we're saying, 'well, the student can present this work, we built their presentation skills to look at this', and they're not judged on a 100% terminal exam where their literacy skills, or perhaps they are dyslexic, whatever it may

be, counterbalances what they perhaps could do. So I think that's what I would definitely impress upon.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. We're in the final 5 minutes.

Participant A?

Participant A: I just want to say that I've just set up a level 2 beauty course that's not on the Progress 8 measures for schools, because I've got children here who want to go into the beauty industry. I've employed a beauty specialist. She's not a teacher, but she's worked in industry for 30 years, and I've got children who are really excited about coming to school to take part and they're going to finish it with a level 2 qualification to then be able to go and do level 3. That definitely needs to be an option for schools, to be able to do that without the accountability pressures. We're doing our best for the children in our schools and the contacts that we're working for.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you for putting the children first. So final question: if you could change one thing about the current 11-16 system, what would it be? Participant C?

Participant C: The exam system. I mean I'm going to leave it at this: how can it be right to put 11 years of education down to a month of long written exams?

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. Participant B?

Participant B: We need to end 100% terminal exams in year 11.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Participant F?

Participant F: Again, it would be around the assessment system. I think that there is far too much that the students need to learn and it doesn't go with the mastery approach. What I'd want to see is that if students can demonstrate this level of skill, they get this grade. If they can demonstrate these skills, they get this grade, etcetera. So actually every student is making progress and every student can feel that success and then move forwards.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Thank you. Participant D?

Participant D: Bring back coursework for history and also keep some of the Ofsted focus on curriculum and not what feels like a swerve back to as I remember it years ago where exam results are going to drive inspections, because I've been there before and it didn't help the kids.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: The perception that we've had is that coursework as part of assessment was really unpopular when we had it and it was an unmanageable workload for teachers. Is that a fixable problem?

Participant D: Yes, it's a fixable problem. But then it's whether the exam boards mark it, and it's the drafting process. Coursework was a pain, but actually what students got out of it was really good.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: OK, thank you. Participant A?

Participant A: Just more autonomy for school leaders to be able to plan their curriculum suitable to the children and the context of not just their schools, but the local area, and for that to be valued and seen in the same way by those people who are measuring us and coming into judge our schools. So it's not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Terrific. Participant G?

Participant G: Linked to that, the fact that it's not fragmented, the support that schools across the country get into giving opportunities to students to get out into the world of work and to experience the softer skills that they need and to provide those opportunities in some form of central package.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: And last word, Participant E?

Participant E: I think it's been said already, but GCSEs need to go and, there's no other way to say it, be replaced with a robust assessment system that assesses a greater range of skills, knowledge and dispositions.

Lord Knight of Weymouth: Terrific. Well, look, thank you all very much. I think we are pretty much out of time.

[End of transcript]