



The Government's Response to the House of Lords Select Committee report on social mobility in the transition from school to work

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Education
by Command of Her Majesty

July 2016



Department
for Education

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Contents

Introduction	3
Recommendations and Government Responses	5
Developing a clearer policy framework and a more effective delivery mechanism	5
Recommendation 1:	5
Recommendation 2:	6
Recommendation 3:	7
Recommendation 4:	8
Recommendation 5:	8
Recommendation 6:	9
Recommendation 7:	10
Recommendation 8:	10
Conclusions and Government Responses	11
Students leave the educational system without the skills necessary for work and life	11
Existing recruitment practices hinder upward mobility	12
Making alternative qualification system coherent, accessible and business-friendly	12

Introduction

The Government is grateful to the Select Committee for its thorough scrutiny of social mobility in the transition from school to work, with a particular focus on the changing youth labour market and routes to work for those who do not do A Levels or go on to higher education.

A key aim of this government's 'one nation' ideal is to tackle the root causes of our unequal society – to support families, to improve education, to give people the help they need to get into work. This is the best way to improve life chances for all.

We are determined to ensure that educational excellence is available to every single child and young person, everywhere in this country. To raise the bar and heighten expectations, and to give schools and colleges the support they need to meet them.

We have made good progress over the last five years.

- Over 1.4 million more pupils attend schools that are rated 'good' or 'outstanding' than in 2010.
- We have made the curriculum and qualifications more rigorous at every stage: 120,000 more 6-year-olds are on track to become confident readers as a result of our focus on phonics.
- We have grown the participation of 16- to- 18-year-olds. 2.9 million apprenticeships (all ages) have been started since May 2010. We have the lowest proportion of 16- to- 18-year-old NEETs since consistent records began.

We want to go even further, building on the work that we started in the last parliament. To make our schools and colleges places where children and young people are supported to enable them to achieve their full potential, and to increase the number who stay on in education or an apprenticeship to 18 and beyond.

We will do this through an education system that extends opportunity to every school and community. We will build on our structural reforms by working towards a system where every school is an academy, giving excellent leaders and teachers the freedom to run their schools and ensure every child gets the education they deserve. Under our reforms, stronger schools will flourish, sharing best practice and innovation, and weaker schools will be identified and

turned around quickly. To deliver real social justice and ensure every child can go to a great school regardless of background or where he or she lives, we need to ensure consistent, world-class teaching across the country.

We are setting higher standards and ensuring a rigorous academic core for all through a new curriculum that really tests our young people. Every pupil will study maths, English, a science, history or geography and a language at GCSE.

We want to create a world class 16 plus skills system which supports all levels of ability and is driven by employers to ensure young people and adults gain the skills most needed for the 21st century economy. Lord Sainsbury has been leading an independent panel to review technical education, and to consider how we can ensure a high quality technical option is available for all young people alongside the well-established academic option. We will shortly be publishing the Sainsbury panel final report, along with a Government response in the form of a Skills Plan which will set out a wider narrative for 16 plus skills reform. This plan will build on our commitment to deliver three million quality apprenticeship starts by 2020. We will ensure we have the right institutions to deliver all of this through area based reviews to reshape the further education sector, bringing together colleges, Local Enterprise Partnerships and local authorities to redesign and restructure provision to align capacity with local economic priorities.

These measures show that the government plans to build on its strong track record in helping to improve the transition to work for all young people. The Committee's report makes a number of helpful recommendations, to which we have given careful consideration.

Detailed responses to each of the conclusions and recommendations in the Committee's report are to be found in the following pages.

The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan
Secretary of State for Education
Minister for Women and Equalities

Nick Boles
Minister of State for Skills

Recommendations and Government Responses

Developing a clearer policy framework and a more effective delivery mechanism

Recommendation 1:

There is a need for more coherence in the UK Government's policy governing the transition of young people into the workplace. The policy should set out a framework for school to work transitions from age 14 to age 19 and over. It should explicitly address the middle route to work, and the decision making that takes place from 14 onwards, and set the standard for sharing best practice across the UK.

Response:

The Government's education policy ensures that all children have a solid education foundation which enables them to have smooth transition from early years, right through primary and secondary education and one that sets them up for future years, whether they go into work based learning, higher education or further education. We are extending opportunity to all young people by equipping them, through a high-quality, rigorous curriculum, with the core knowledge and skills most valued by employers.

We are reforming GCSEs and A levels to be robust and rigorous, to match the best education systems in the world and to keep pace with universities' and employers' demands. The reforms aim to ensure that GCSEs and A levels are qualifications in which students, employers and further and higher education institutions can have confidence.

The Government agrees that the 16 plus skills system in England is complex by international standards and it lacks clear, high-quality progression routes to higher level skills. Employers are not engaged enough in the design and delivery of training and continue to report significant skills gaps and skills shortages.

We have made significant progress in addressing these issues. Employer-led apprenticeship reforms are seeing employers designing high quality apprenticeships across a range of occupations to meet their skills needs. We have removed thousands of poor quality qualifications from 16-19 performance tables.

But we need to do more to create an employer-driven skills system that supports more people to develop the higher levels skills needed by our economy.

We are now planning reforms to technical education which will ensure that the skills system is simple and genuinely owned, understood and valued by employers.

To deliver the reforms, the Government is working closely with an independent panel, headed by Lord Sainsbury. The panel has considered a range of recommendations and the Government will publish the panel's report and our response shortly.

Recommendation 2:

The transition stage should be considered from age 14 to age 19. Learning during this stage should include a core curriculum with tailor made academic and/or vocational courses. It should aim to get as many people who can, up to a level 3 qualification. There are three important strands to the framework:

- (a) Clearer routes to good quality work for those in the middle, brought about by local collaboration, to enable:
 - i) Vocational routes to work which are robust and high quality, do not close down future opportunities, and lead to worthwhile destinations. The work of the Sainsbury led review should contribute to this.
 - ii) Meaningful experience of work, organised between the student, the school and a local employer, including work placements and work-based training. Any work experiences undertaken must have a clear aim and objective to prepare young people for work and life.
- (b) A new gold standard in independent careers advice and guidance, supported by a robust evidence base and drawing on existing expertise, which moves responsibility away from schools and colleges (which would require legislative change) in order to ensure that students are given independent advice about the different routes and qualifications available, to include:
 - i) Independent, face-to-face, careers advice, which provides good quality, informed advice on more than just academic routes, so that individuals are able to make decisions based on sound knowledge of what is available.
 - ii) A single access point for all information on vocational options, including the labour market returns on qualifications.
- (c) Improved careers education in schools, to empower young people to make good choices for themselves, to include:
 - i) Information on labour market returns, which would include information about the financial prospects of different options, to inform and motivate young people.

- ii) Data on local labour markets to inform the teaching of Life Skills, skills for life and careers education

Response:

The Government's education policy, which ensures transition from early years right through a young person's education and onto work, as mentioned in our response to Recommendation 1 also applies here.

The Government is doing a lot to improve careers provision. Later this year we will publish the government's strategy for improved careers education and guidance for young people – it will provide a roadmap for this parliament and set out a clear vision of what we want to achieve by 2020. We aim to build consensus across key partners including the Careers & Enterprise Company, education and training providers, teachers, parents, employers and careers professionals.

During his recent appearance in front of the Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy, the Minister for Childcare and Education, Sam Gyimah MP, announced that we will make the Gatsby benchmarks the focus of the statutory guidance that supports schools and colleges to implement the careers duty. This is in direct response to calls from schools to make it clear what government is expecting from them in terms of careers education.

We also intend to bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity to require schools to co-operate with other education and training providers so that they can engage with pupils, on the school premises, to inform them directly about what they offer.

Recommendation 3:

This transition framework should be owned by, and be the responsibility of, a Cabinet level Minister, who will assume ultimate responsibility for the transition from school to work for young people.

Response:

We agree that the transition from school to work for young people is one of the Government's most cross-cutting priorities but a number of departments have an important role in overseeing this. That is why the Earn or Learn Implementation Task Force brings together key Ministers and officials on a regular basis to oversee work across Government to realise its ambition of abolishing long-term youth unemployment. The Task Force will track the delivery of apprenticeships, the Youth Obligation and other key programmes supporting young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of being NEET. By bringing departments together the Task Force will work to overcome barriers hindering implementation of these programmes and will help ensure a successful transition from school to work so that

all young people are earning or learning. The Task Force reports to the Prime Minister and to Cabinet on a regular basis.

Recommendation 4:

Transitions from school to work should be supported by publicly available data, compiled by the relevant Government departments. This data should be made available to researchers so they have access to earnings data, study patterns, and different demographic patterns, brought about by legislative change if necessary.

Response:

One of our major priorities is to improve the availability of, and access to, data about transitions. The Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015 allows us to combine destinations data with employment, benefits and earnings information from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions. This will improve the information available about young people's destinations, including those 'not in education, employment or training' and those who go into employment after their study. We are looking for ways in which researchers could be given secure access to the destinations data to carry out analysis, which could add to the understanding of young people's transitions from education to work. The Government has announced plans to include measures in the Digital Economy Bill to enable access to public sector-held data for research purposes where there is a public benefit, which would facilitate this.

Recommendation 5:

We recommend that the responsible Cabinet Minister should report on progress annually to Parliament.

Response:

We are already reporting progress in a number of ways. Since 2013, we have been publishing annual statistical first releases on the English and maths qualifications entered and achieved by students aged 16-18 in England who did not achieve a GCSE grade A* to C by the end of key stage 4, and the same methodology underpins the new headline performance measure, reporting from January 2017, with shadow reports later this summer.

We are reforming our headline 16-18 accountability measures. For the first time, English and maths will feature as a headline 16-18 performance measure. The measure will recognise the progress made in English and maths for students who have not achieved at least a grade C at key stage 5.

The Government also continues to monitor the engagement of young people through regular official published data - which shows changes in the proportion and number of NEET young people and those participating in post-16 education or training.

The Department for Education is also reporting on a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in relation to social mobility through its Single Departmental Plan. They include the number of young people taking level 3 science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) technical levels; percentage of young people at 19 with a 'good pass' in English and maths GCSEs 62.1%; and attainment of 16- to 19-year-olds.

When we publish new strategies, for example, in response to Lord Sainsbury's review of technical education, we will report on progress in implementing any recommendations.

Recommendation 6:

Increasingly local labour markets and skills needs are being seen as a devolved responsibility, whether it be conurbations such as London, Manchester or Leeds, or to rural areas such as Somerset or Lincolnshire. However, because administrative structures are so much in flux, there is no focal point for action. The most valuable role the Government can take is to act as a facilitator, coordinating the efforts of its existing structures, and brokering collaboration between existing local bodies such as further education colleges, schools, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and employers.

Response:

It is not Government's role to decide what works best for local areas.

Devolution is an opportunity for local areas to take more responsibility to promote effective coordinated response to local labour market needs rather than depending on leadership from Whitehall.

We agree that Government has a role to play in supporting local areas to take on this responsibility. There are post-16 area reviews which are reshaping the post-16 provider base area-by-area to meet local labour market needs. The reviews are locally steered and where combined authorities are securing devolution agreements, they will often chair the steering group overseeing the review. The steering group includes all colleges, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and local authorities as well as the Regional Schools Commissioner, Sixth Form College Commissioner and Further Education (FE) Commissioners. In developing their thinking about the shape of the college base for their area, they will take account of the views of learners, employers, staff, other providers and others.

We also believe that putting commissioning power over adult education in the hands of combined authorities will enable better alignment of provision with the outcomes which the local economy requires, and will better meet the needs of young people entering the labour market. Central government is working closely with existing and emergent combined authorities in preparation for devolution of the adult education budget from 2018/19. We aim to ensure that local areas are well placed to derive maximum benefit from the flexibility and choice they will have over adult education, as well as being able to exert influence over choices made by learners and employers about training which is not funded through public authorities, such as apprenticeships.

Recommendation 7:

The Government should keep under constant review the degree of success of transitions into work for those in the middle. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission should play a strong part in monitoring these transitions.

Response:

We agree about the importance of continually reviewing the degree of success of transitions. The Government is committed to working with the Commission in its tasks of assessing improvement in social mobility in the UK and advocating for better social mobility in England. The Commission will publish its next report to parliament before 31 March 2017.

Recommendation 8:

We therefore recommend that the Government should commission a cost benefit analysis of increasing funding for careers education in school and independent careers guidance external to the school in the context of social mobility. A report providing this analysis should be made available to Parliament before the end of its 2016-17 session.

Response:

We think the case for serious investment in careers education and guidance is clear. We are committing £90m to careers policy over this Parliament. This comprises of £70 million for our careers strategy, including further funding for The Careers & Enterprise Company to continue the excellent work it has started, and £20 million to increase the number of mentors from the world of work supporting young people at risk of under-achieving.

In addition, there will be a major programme of research work, including by the Education Endowment Fund.

Conclusions and Government Responses

Students leave the educational system without the skills necessary for work and life

Conclusion: Employers say they look for more than just qualifications in their recruits. They want their employees to arrive with the skills to succeed in the workplace: communication, team working, resilience and self-management. Many of these skills can only be gained through experience of work, either through work placements, or once in employment. For young people who do not have access to work-based training, the education system can go some way towards teaching these skills. However, Life Skills are not embedded in an effective way alongside or within the curriculum, and young people leave the education system insufficiently prepared for adulthood and the world of work. (Paragraph 49)

Response:

We agree with the importance of addressing this challenge, which is why we have already introduced changes to ensure a greater emphasis on experience of the world of work and the skills to succeed in the workplace. It is up to schools to determine the best way to deliver work experience and other life skills opportunities for their pupils. Study programmes for 16-19 year olds were introduced in August 2013. The study programme principles apply to all post-16 education providers and include that all students should be offered the opportunity to undertake work experience as part of their non-qualification activity.

We also want schools to support young people to ensure that they develop the qualities that will prepare them for adult life; qualities like the ability to bounce back from challenge, the ability to work well with others, and confidence in themselves and their capacity for self-improvement. These character qualities, values and behaviours are sought by parents, educators and employers. Businesses have made it clear that the 'right attitudes and attributes - such as resilience, respect, enthusiasm and creativity - are just as important as academic or technical skills.' (CBI). The best schools are already working to build these traits in young people, and we want to ensure that this best practice is shared so that all young people can develop the skills that make a difference. We announced in the recent White Paper, Educational Excellence Everywhere, that we will develop a web-presence through which teachers can access resources and share their practice with their colleagues, including new tools to measure their progress in building key character traits in their pupils. The Chancellor announced in the Budget that we will be investing over £500m so that 25 per cent of secondary schools can extend their school day to include a wider range of activities.

We want to provide all young people with a curriculum for life that prepares them to succeed in modern Britain. High quality teaching of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is central to that and we expect all schools to teach it.

Existing recruitment practices hinder upward mobility

Conclusion: Employer recruitment practices disadvantage those in the middle and at the bottom end of the labour market. Small and medium-sized businesses in particular rely on this informal means of recruitment, such as word-of-mouth. Using this sort of recruitment means that applicants' existing social networks and connections are important and lead to their success. Not all young people will have these connections. We welcome the fact that some employers are already changing their recruitment practices to address these problems. We note however that these changes are not widespread, are limited to the largest employers and will not go far enough on their own to achieve real progress. (Paragraph 58)

The expansion of higher education has served some groups well. It has however, disadvantaged those already underserved by the education system and inhibited upward social mobility for those in the middle. (Paragraph 93)

Response:

We welcome that the report acknowledges the efforts that many employers are making to bring about change in their recruitment practices.

Through the Social Mobility Business Compact nearly 200 businesses have committed to provide fair, accessible, high quality work experience and internship opportunities and to ensure that their recruitment practices eliminate barriers to social mobility. The aim is to open up opportunity and eliminate informal recruitment networks that act as barriers to social mobility.

In 2014 the Champion tier of the Social Mobility Business Compact was launched to increase the pace of change and encourage businesses to go further in their efforts to improve social mobility. As well as bringing about change within their own organisations, 11 organisations have met the Champion standard and are leading the way and laying the foundations for others to follow. Whilst most signatories are large employers the Compact is open to employers of any size and across all sectors.

Making alternative qualification system coherent, accessible and business-friendly

Conclusion: Non-academic routes to employment are complex, confusing and incoherent. The qualifications system is similarly confused and has been subjected to continual change. (Paragraph 94)

These options do not guarantee routes into good quality employment. The qualifications themselves are often poorly understood by employers. Employers cannot be expected to

understand what skills unfamiliar qualifications represent and cannot be expected to have knowledge and faith in their quality. (Paragraph 95)

Response:

We agree with the Committee that the confusing and ever-changing multitude of qualifications, including over 13,000 available to 16- to- 18-year-olds, sometimes hold little value in the eyes of young people or are not understood or sought by employers. This has led to an erosion of trust and confidence in the system and evidence shows that young people, parents and teachers have long regarded technical qualifications as inferior to academic qualifications and tend to believe they are most suited to less able learners.

Successive governments have failed to make the significant reforms to technical education that are needed and to learn from the successful systems in other countries. The government established the Independent Panel on Technical Education, led by Lord Sainsbury, with a view to advising Ministers on actions to improve the quality of technical education in England and, in particular, to simplify the current system and to ensure the new system provides the skills most needed for the 21st century. The report and the government response will be published shortly.

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