



Social Mobility  
Commission

**Social Mobility Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
12.00 - 4.30pm  
Wednesday 27 February 2019  
Crowne Plaza Hotel Stephenson Quarter  
Newcastle**

**Attendees: Commissioners**

Dame Martina Milburn (Chair)  
Saeed Atcha  
Alastair da Costa  
Pippa Dunn  
Sam Friedman  
Harvey Matthewson  
Farrah Storr  
Jessica Oghenegweke  
Sandra Wallace  
Liz Williams  
Sammy Wright  
Members of the Secretariat

**Apologies:** Steven Cooper and Jody Walker

1. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting including Secretariat's first apprentice. It was the first meeting held outside of London and was preceded by Board members and Secretariat undertaking visits to Southmoor Academy in Sunderland and Newcastle United Foundation National Citizenship Service, a provider of NCS programmes in the North East.

**Item 1 – Review of progress to date**

2. The Chair highlighted the importance of the Commission's messages reaching wide ranging and diverse audiences. She suggested a review of its communications strategy including the various social media platforms that could play a much more prominent role in future as well as traditional media platforms. **Secretariat working with Farrah Storr would bring a paper to the May/June meeting setting out options for using alternative social media platforms as well as traditional media.**

3. The Chair noted her upcoming meeting with Justin Madders and Baroness Claire Tyler of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility. They wanted

to discuss the Commission's priorities and its future relationship with the APPG. **The Chair agreed to feedback to the Board following the meeting.**

4. The Chair shared the contents of the letter she had received from Minister Nadhim Zahawi. **Secretariat would (a) circulate the letter to commissioners and (b) commissioners to feedback any comments to Secretariat.**

### **Item 2 - The 2018-19 Annual Report – Commissioner engagement (Paper A)**

5. Secretariat outlined the Annual Report timetable and the process for engaging Commissioners. Briefing sessions along the life stages were taking place later in the afternoon with further briefing sessions arranged for the following week. Thereafter chapters would be finalised and sent to Commissioners for comment before sending to the Chair. **Commissioners were asked to let Secretariat know if they wanted to attend a particular briefing session or join a conference call and to provide their preferred contact details.**

6. Themes covered and points raised in the afternoon sessions are set out below.

### **Overall assessment**

- the rise in child poverty in the 1980s was interesting and should be incorporated back into the report;
- Secretariat should look at the unemployment rates for people from different backgrounds split by education level. **Secretariat agreed to add this;**
- an explanation of what 'equality act' and the definition of disabled meant should be added;
- the term 'income mobility' was complex and required clearer explanation. **Secretariat agreed to provide Commissioners with a short statement explaining this more clearly and agreed to include it in the annual report;**
- the class pay gap should be expressed in percentage terms rather than monetary terms.

**Early years** discussion focused on the recently published Education Select Committee report on 'Tackling disadvantage in the Early Years'; the first national roll-out of the 30 hours childcare policy and the issue of pay in the early years workforce.

**Schools** discussion focused on the changing accountability within schools and the new Ofsted inspection framework. Commissioners were also presented with the internal research on the impact of curricular and qualifications reform.

### **FE**

- Commissioners asked for a suggested recommendation to be split into two clear recommendations calling for:
  - equalised spending per pupil in FE;
  - a review on whether all the funds that together make up the equivalent of the Pupil Premium in FE is adequate

- The scale and diversity of the FE sector was highlighted – 2.1 million students in just 180 colleges with a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students.

**HE** discussion focused on:

- the rise in unconditional offers, particularly the use of conditional and unconditional offers. Their systematic and widespread use was unlikely to help most students;
- exploration of a post-qualification admissions system could be an aspiration;
- a range of higher education qualifications that were alternatives to the traditional Three-year undergraduate degrees and how these could be benefit social mobility.

**Working Life** Commissioners looked at the definitions for ‘mid’ ‘high’ and ‘low’ pay; how the voluntary Living Wage interacts with social mobility and how the argument could be articulated since it is a recommendation in the annual report.

**Apprenticeships** discussions focused on:

- whether apprenticeships were viewed and used as a tool to fill industrial skills gaps or as a tool for social mobility;
- how the levy has changed employers’ behaviours, including incentivising ‘rebadging’ of existing training programmes
- whether *progression* through apprenticeship levels should be as valued or important as progression through academic routes (e.g. GCSEs to A levels to HE)
- whether apprenticeships are the best tool for adult retraining.

Given the apprenticeship agenda was still quite new, the Commission’s new research programme would be able to provide answers to some of these questions.

### **Stakeholder mapping landscape and future research programme (Board Paper B)**

7. Secretariat set out details of previous social mobility initiatives. For example, the government’s Social Mobility Business Compact; its Champion Tier and more recently the Social Mobility Foundation Employers Index and Justine Greening’s Social Mobility Pledge. Within the employer space, sat our Employers’ Toolkit. Work continued on this but the expectation is that this would be published in the summer.

8. Secretariat noted the additional £2m funding for 2019-20 from the Department for Education for the Commission’s new research and evidence fund.

Extensive engagement between Secretariat and stakeholders, academics, think tanks and other actors within the social mobility space had helped to identify research gaps and to inform the Commission’s research proposals.

The shortlist of first phase projects were presented for the Board’s approval. Given the very tight timescales - Secretariat needed to tender the first phase projects in March to enable the findings to feed into the Commission’s 2019-20 State of the

Nation report. **Following a broad discussion, the first phase projects were approved. Secretariat would develop tender proposals for the Board's clearance.**

9. It was recognised that stakeholders publish their own research and there was potential for some overlap in areas that the Commission were pursuing. Following discussion, it was agreed that the **Secretariat would consider its stakeholder strategy in the coming months to identify areas for joint working and discuss at a future Board meeting.**

10. **Future meetings and AOB**

- **Secretariat to circulate presentation packs, index of stakeholder organisations and summary documents**

**Next meeting: Thursday 28 March**