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Preface

This issue sees a number of changes to the Journal. As well as a new editor, for this is my first issue, there is also a new name. This issue of *Education Journal Review* (Vol. 25 No. 2) continues where the last issue of *Education Review* (Vol. 25 No. 1) left off. For many years *Education Review* was the journal of the National Union of Teachers. That union no longer exists, having merged with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers to form the National Education Union. Among the many changes that have taken place in the years around that merger, the union is no longer directly involved with *Education Journal Review*. However, the objective remains the same. To provide a journal of relevance to practitioners of education as well as academics, a journal that explores the full range of subjects that those who work in education may face. As the expanded title will suggest, we are now including some aspects of the research section of our sister publication, *Education Journal* magazine.

Education Journal Review combines a number of different types of article. The main content remains original papers and articles in long-form. These include an article on a major report from the Association of Directors of Children's Services on the challenges of safeguarding during a time of austerity. These major contributions are complemented by short-form articles that were originally published in the weekly title *Education Journal.*

Reflecting the importance of the ever-changing policy environment that those who work in have to contend with, the third section of this issue contains reviews of all parliamentary select committee reports on eduction. As readers will see, these are not just from the Education Committee. Indeed, most are not. We include reviews of every education report from all committees in the House of Commons and the House of Lords published from January 2018. In this issue we include all reports from House of Commons select committees published up to June 2018. Those published after June will be included in the next issue.

Laura Coryton
Editor

What determines literacy policies: evidence or ideology? The power of politicians over policy and practice

By Margaret M. Clark OBE

Margaret M. Clark OBE

Margaret M Clark was awarded a DLitt for her early published research on reading and an OBE for her services to early years education. She has been elected to the Reading Hall of Fame, an independent organisation that recognises lifetime achievement in the field of reading. She was Professor and Head of the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Birmingham and is now a Visiting Professor at Newman University.

Abstract*: This article traces the development of government policy on literacy learning in England since 2006, with the requirement that synthetic phonics be the way to teach all children to read and the statutory Phonics Screening Check since 2012 be taken by all children at the end of Year 1 (about six-years-of-age). Evidence is presented challenging the claims by the government for this policy which now dominates classroom practice and the content of courses for initial teacher education in England. Successive Secretaries of State for Education and Ofsted inspectors are shown to have endorsed this policy uncritically and no attempt has been made to consult the teaching profession. Research evidence is summarised on the disturbing effect of the check on the classroom experiences of young children from as early as nursery class, and the dominance of practice in decoding, in particular, of pseudo words (20 of the 40 words on the check) as a consequence of the high percentage pass on the check required of schools by DfE and Ofsted. The voices of the children and teachers are cited based on recent research and the views of teachers and parents on the check based on an independent survey are outlined. These show the concern of many teachers and parents at the negative effect of current government policy.*

Keywords: literacy, policy, practice, politics, ideology.

Government literacy policy on learning to read in England since 2006 appears to have its origins in the Rose Report, The Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading (Rose, 2006). A critique of the report is to be found in chapter 13 of Learning to be Literate: Insights from research for policy and practice (Clark, 2016) with further evaluation in chapter 7 by Clark and chapter 8 by Greg Brooks in Reading the Evidence: Synthetic phonics and literacy learning (Clark, 2017a). Since 2006 my aim has been to present a balanced picture of the evidence concerning the government's mandatory policy in England that the method of teaching reading should be by synthetic phonics only, and since 2012 that the Phonics Screening Check be a statutory assessment taken by all children in state primary schools at the end of Year 1, when about six years of age. The check has 40 words (20 real and 20 pseudo words) which the child is required to read out loud to the teacher. Those who fail to achieve a mark of 32 out of 40, the pass mark, are required to re-sit the check the following year. What had initially been claimed as a light touch diagnostic check has become a high stakes assessment with schools expected to raise their percentage pass year on year.

The results are scrutinised both by the government and by Ofsted. The increase in the percentage pass on the check is claimed to show that more children each year are, thanks to this policy, on their way to becoming fluent readers. I analysed these developments in Part IV of Learning to be Literate: insights from research for policy and practice (Clark, 2014), updating this evidence in a revised edition in 2016. The School Standards Minister Nick Gibb, who has been committed to this policy since 2005, recommended to the Federal Government in Australia that it should, on the basis of its success in England, adopt synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading and introduce the Phonics Screening Check into Australia. I felt that a balanced picture of the evidence from England was not being presented in Australia. In two edited books in 2017 and 2018 I presented evidence from seventeen academics in the United Kingdom, Australia, The United States, The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The latter two countries, with very different literacy policies, and with teachers involved in their development and implementation, ranked statistically higher than England in the recently reported findings of PIRLS 2016 (Clark, 2018).

The School Standards Minister for England Nick Gibb, immediately on publication of the PIRLS 2016 results in December 2017 made a speech at the British Library where he claimed not only that England's improvement in ranking on this assessment of ten-year-olds was the result of the phonics policy but also that children's potential had previously been stunted, not by their teachers but because of 'a dogmatic romanticism that prevented the spread of evidence-based teaching practices'. This he followed with a sweeping indictment: "Despite the evidence in favour of phonics – we faced opposition from various lobby groups: those opposed to testing, those professors of education who had built a career on teaching teachers to use the 'look and say' approach, and the teaching unions."
(Gibb, 2017)

He further stated that his case for synthetic phonics as the method for teaching reading is 'not an un-evidenced assertion' and is one 'backed up by decades of research' Unfortunately the research he still chooses to quote is that in Clackmannanshire in Scotland whose methodology has been heavily criticised by many researchers (see chapter 14 in Clark, 2016 and chapter 2 by Glazzard, 2018). The School Standards Minister continues this theme in his recent speeches. Those who read Reading the Evidence: Synthetic phonics and literacy learning (Clark, 2017a) dispassionately checking for evidence, would have found extensive research to challenge the claim that prior to recent government policy, phonics was not evident in classrooms in England and in The United States, where similar claims were made in 1990s, or indeed recently in Australia. That book contains a collection of papers by five literacy experts from the United Kingdom and Australia showing that phonics did already have a place in classroom practice. In Reading the Evidence, we included in the appendices, statements made by UKLA in 2014 in The United Kingdom, and a joint statement by ALEA and PETAA in Australia in 2016, both backed by extensive references (Clark, 2017a). Shortly after the publication of Reading the Evidence, the results of PIRLS the Progress in International Reading Study 2016, were released in December 2017. Critics claimed the results invalidated our claims in that book, as England's ranking had risen in this latest assessment of literacy of ten-year-olds when compared with the previous assessment in 2011, rising from joint 10th to joint 8th. This improved ranking, according Nick

Gibb, was caused by current policy and the phonics check which these children were the first to sit. Such claims are considered in a more recent book, Teaching Initial Literacy: Policy, evidence and ideology with contributions from a further twelve academics (Clark, 2018). Cautions are sounded in the report on PIRLS in drawing causal connections from this single set of data. It is also pointed out that not all countries that have an emphasis on phonics rank high. Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland rank statistically higher than England on PIRLS yet no attention has been drawn in England to what we might learn from these literacy policies which differ greatly from that in England. Readers are referred to these two edited books for evidence on the development of and effects, intended and unintended of the Phonics Screening Check on the literacy experiences of young children in England.

Evidence on the views of teachers on the Phonics Screening Check was to be found in the government funded research by the National Foundation for Educational Research as early 2015, covering the early years of the check before it became such a high stakes assessment. Even then teachers reported it was having effects on the classroom literacy experiences of young children, some of which concerned them (see chapter 16 of Clark, 2016, chapter 9 in Clark, 2017a). The government ignored the findings of this research although it was commissioned by DfE. In 2017 the government launched a consultation on assessment in primary schools in England in which reference is made to the Phonics Screening Check as a statutory assessment for children at the end of Year 1. There are questions on the future of other assessments, yet no questions as to the future of the phonics check, whether it should remain, and if so as a statutory assessment. I have evidence that this omission was no accident, based on the answer I received when I raised this issue at the Westminster Forum on December 7, 2017 following a presentation on the consultation.

The place of phonics testing in primary schools: the government consultation on assessment in primary schools in England

Below are extracts from an article, (Clark, 2017b) in the Education Journal 2017 306: 12-14 summarising the evidence I was submitting to the DfE consultation (Primary Assessment in England: Government consultation. Launch 30 March 2017.

Standards and Testing Agency. Reference STA/17/7935/e ISBN 978-1-78644-438-7). The DfE issued this consultation document on Primary Assessment in March 2017, with the 22 June as the closing date for responses. I considered the justification for the Phonics Screening Check remaining a statutory assessment in primary schools and the claim that synthetic phonics is the way to teach reading, as repeatedly claimed by the School Standards Minister Nick Gibb.

On page 10 of the consultation document reference is made to the phonics screening test as: "A light-touch, statutory screening check administered by teachers. The check assesses a pupil's phonics decoding ability to identify pupils needing additional support…Pupils who do not meet the required standard are required to re-sit in year 2."

Twenty questions are posed in the consultation document to which one is asked to respond. To my surprise, no questions are raised as to the future of the Phonics Screening Check, whether it should remain, and if so, as a statutory assessment. Following the consultation, it was possible that the only other assessments remaining in Year 1 might be teacher assessments. Thus, the screening check, whose reliability, validity and effect on the curriculum were not even being scrutinised, was likely to remain a statutory assessment. This pass/fail check with percentage pass within each school recorded each year, and an expectation of an increase in percentage pass each year, is far from being a light-touch diagnostic assessment as claimed. Disturbingly, it could become an even higher stakes measurement, with percentage pass an important aspect in school accountability as measured by Ofsted and the government.

No evidence-based criticisms of the status accorded by the government to synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading, or of the success of the screening test as having raised standards in anything other than the test itself have dented the School Standards Minister Nick Gibb's faith in the policy. In the Conservative Manifesto only a few pages were devoted to primary education, yet, on page 51 reference was made to two key aspects of government policy for primary education:

"We will build on the success of the phonics screening test. We will expect every 11-year-old to know their times tables off by heart."

This government that claims its policy is evidence-

based offers a depressing future for young children in the 21st century in primary school in England, as in their early years they will be expected to practise pseudo words, recite their tables and learn grammatical terms! Sadly, many of the youngest children will also have been recorded by the age of six as having failed the phonics check.

The following are important points to which I drew attention in Clark, 2017b:

i) The large difference in pass rate each year between the oldest and youngest children; thus, many of the youngest children, particularly boys, are labelled failures early in their school career.

ii) Not only are half the words in the phonics check pseudo words, but each year the first twelve words in the check have been pseudo words. Some of those confused by the pseudo words have been children who could already read, or children who have attempted to make these into real words. There are children, including some autistic children, who refused to attempt pseudo words, but read all the real words correctly, thus failing the check. The instructions for the check are ambiguous meaning that some teachers might stop the check without giving children who fail on pseudo words the opportunity to try the real words.

Recent developments in the phonics policy in England

The dictates from DfE and Ofsted on the place of synthetic phonics and the importance for schools of a high and increasing percentage pass on the phonics check were, I felt having a major impact on practice in schools, and institutions training teachers in England, removing the freedom of practitioners to adopt the approaches they think appropriate for their individual children. Yet the government remains committed to expenditure on further synthetic phonics initiatives, even funding a pilot study in 300 schools to consider whether the check should be repeated in Year 3 by those children who failed the phonics check in Year 2. The report of this study by NFER was not published but in a written answer Nick Gibb, School Standards Minister stated this policy would not be implemented. (NB Following a Freedom of Information

Question I did manage to obtain a copy of the report).

Until recently there was only anecdotal evidence on the effects of these developments on young children's experiences of and attitudes towards literacy. How will this greater emphasis on phonics in the early stages, the isolated nature of much of their tuition in phonics, the new emphasis on pseudo words and the phonics check influence their understanding of the nature of literacy and attitude to reading, also their parents` ideas as to how to help their young children? We need evidence from the children, including those who passed the check, any who could read but failed the check, and those required to re-sit the following year. The assumption that the needs of those who fail to reach the arbitrary pass mark on this check may still be met by a continuing focus on synthetic phonics as the solution to their problems seems naive.

Freedom of Information Questions enabled me to estimate the large amount of money spent by government on synthetics phonics, including on commercial materials and courses. There are no records of how much has been spent by schools on commercial synthetic phonics products in attempting year on year to increase their percentage pass on the Phonics Screening Check, nor how much has been spent by institutions training primary school teachers in England in meeting Ofsted's demand for a focus on synthetic phonics. From what was originally referred to as a `light touch` assessment this has become a high stakes form of data, used by Ofsted in its judgement of a school's standing. Although the results for individual schools are not published they are available on Raiseonline, accessible to Ofsted inspectors.

At the Westminster Education Forum Keynote Seminar on 7 December 2017 the findings of the consultation document were reported. The answer I received to a question to the speaker confirmed my suspicion that the future of the Phonics Screening Check was not indeed scrutinised as part of the consultation. The lack of evidence as to the views of teachers and parents on the effects, intended and unintended, of the Phonics Screening Check was the reason for planning our recently completed independent survey. We felt that teachers and parents might have valuable evidence and be more concerned than their present comparative silence suggested. Our main aims were to establish whether in the view of the profession and parents what has now become a high stakes assessment does provide any valuable diagnostic information.

In their opinion is it value for money, should it remain, and if so as a statutory measure? What is the value if any, in recording the result as pass/fail and in requiring any children who fail to retake the check the following year? What is the effect of the inclusion of pseudo words in the check (which are 20 of the 40 words). It is important to consider the views of teachers and parents as to the effect the imposition of this assessment is having not only on those who fail but on children who were already reading with understanding at the time they were assessed. My attention was drawn to recent research into the effect of the check on grouping in early years classrooms in England shortly after we had completed the survey (Bradbury, 2018 and Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). Here I present a summary of that and other relevant researches.

The Government insists that synthetics phonics be the mandatory only way of teaching all children in England to read. Furthermore, those who fail the check have more of the same, with the assumption that this method will in the end achieve success for all children. At a time of cuts to school budgets it seems appropriate to put the expenditure on this policy under scrutiny. I have been able to find out how much money is being spent by DfE on the phonics check, synthetic phonics materials and training courses. There is no way to establish how much money is being spent by schools to achieve a higher percentage pass each year on the check in order to be judged successful by DfE and Ofsted. However Bradbury (2018) notes that over 5,000 schools are using a commercial scheme recommended by DfE and in our recent survey we have been able to ask Head Teachers their views on such expenditure.

Comments

The NFER research in 2015 raised issues about the costs and benefits of a one-off assessment versus teachers being well-trained to monitor children's progress. What we have in England is a one-off pass/fail assessment, where the child reaches or fails to reach an arbitrary prescribed standard, an assessment that is expensive to administer, which may over-estimate the children at risk, which is not diagnostic and where funding has not been allocated for alternative methods which might have been appropriate for at least some of the children who failed the check. It should be noted that Nick Gibb was not the only person to place his faith in the government's phonics policy and the check. In spite of the evidence from the NFER

research, Nicky Morgan, the Secretary of State for Education added her voice to that of Sir Michael Wilshaw, HMCI and Nick Gibb, in claiming in The House of Commons: "We have a relentless focus on academic standards, with 120,000 more six-year-olds on track to become confident readers thanks to our focus on phonics."
(19 October 2015: Hansard Column 680) (quoted in Clark, 2016: 144)

In 2012 Sir Michael Wilshaw stated that: "Ofsted will sharpen its focus on phonics in routine inspections of all initial teacher education provision – primary and secondary and Further Education. Ofsted will also start a series of unannounced inspections solely on the training of phonics teaching in providers of primary initial teacher education."
(*Education*, online No 461 16 March 2012) (Quoted in Clark, 2014: 154, the first edition of Learning to be Literate)
With such official endorsements of phonics, not only in schools but in institutions that train primary teachers, the effect the Phonics Screening Check has had on practice in primary schools in England should come as no surprise.

Research evidence on the effects of the Phonics Screening Check between 2012 and 2018

Background: Politics and policies

In a written question in parliament on 18 July 2018, Peter Kyle asked the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that the Centre of Excellence for Literacy Teaching provides support for learners with dyslexia and other literacy needs. Nick Gibb's reply followed the same lines as all his statements on literacy, yet again referring 'to evidence-based practice in all aspects of early literacy, for all children, including systematic phonics'. He stated that the Department is currently in process of selecting English Hubs which will share effective practice with a particular focus on language and literacy teaching in reception and Key Stage 1.

He further claimed that 'there is also evidence that structured synthetic phonics teaching, in addition to engaging with reading books, can also help pupils in reception and Key Stage 1 with dyslexia to read well'. Further he again stated that: 'The reformed National Curriculum and the Phonics Screening Check, encourage teachers to use this method and since the

introduction of The Phonics Screening Check in 2012, 154,000 more six-year-olds are on track to become fluent readers'. Again, he cited England's slightly higher ranking in PIRLS 2016 than in 2011 as proof of the success of the government's policy, yet still ignoring the statistically higher ranking of The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland with very different literacy policies, and with the involvement of professionals in the development and implementation of their literacy policies (see Clark, 2018).

Among the recommendations in the Ofsted Report Bold Beginnings on the Reception curriculum published in November 2017 are the following:

All primary schools should:

1) make sure that the teaching of reading, including systematic synthetic phonics, is the core purpose of the Reception Year
2) ensure that when children are learning to write resources are suitable for their stage of development and that they are taught correct pencil grip and how to sit correctly at a table.

Initial teacher education providers should:

1) Devote a greater proportion of their training programme in the teaching of reading, including systematic synthetic phonics as the route to decoding words, and the composition of numbers, so that all newly qualified teachers are competent and confident to teach early literacy and mathematics.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reception-curriculum-in-good-and-outstanding-schools

We plan to investigate what proportion of their time is already devoted by students in training to synthetic phonics and whether Ofsted indeed does have such information.

That report has caused consternation and an outcry among early years professionals concerned that Ofsted has become the uncritical voice and enforcer of government policy. To quote Scott from her critique of Ofsted's current role: *The power of Ofsted over approaches to the teaching of Reading:*

"Not only is Ofsted inspecting uncritically in the context of government policy, it is also failing to interrogate the evidence and to challenge the ill-conceived approach that is being imposed on young children. Indeed, the pressures in schools to show achievement and progress at all costs and the fear of the effects of a weak Ofsted report are leading to counter-productive ways of working in many classrooms.

(Scott, 2018: 86). The research reported here illustrates the effects of some of the practices feared by Scott.

A further policy of The Department for Education announced on 11 April 2018 was that it plans to introduce a statutory baseline assessment in autumn 2020. This further policy means that children will be assessed by their teachers shortly after they enter reception class. According to Nick Gibb who announced this, it will be used as the baseline for measuring the progress primary schools make with their pupils...providing a fairer measure of accountability. It has been reported that the assessment will be by the teachers, will last about 20 minutes and will be recorded on a computer. It will cover communication, language, literacy and early mathematical skills, and possibly self-regulation. The National Foundation for Educational Research has been awarded the contract worth around £10 million to undertake the pilot study. Apparently, it was the only bidder as CEM and Early Excellence declined to tender. Yet these were the three assessments authorised by DfE over the period 2015-16 for which DfE reimbursed schools which used them during an earlier attempt to introduce such an assessment.

This is another example of a policy dictated by central government with a focus on accountability, which like the Phonics Screening Check (a statutory assessment since 2012), is likely to have major implications for practice in the early years. This move, like the recommendations of Bold Beginnings, the Ofsted report cited above, has been opposed by many researchers concerned about its implications for practice as well as the known unreliability of such assessments of young children (see Clark, 2017c, chapter 10 and a report by an expert panel from BERA, 2018).

Research evidence

Summarised here are the findings of three independent research studies on the impact of the Phonics Screening Check on classroom practice and the views of teachers on the value of the check. The children now also have a voice. The first of these researches by the National Foundation for Educational Research was commissioned by the Department for Education over the period 2012-2015.The focus of the second research was on the views of teachers, and children who had recently sat the check. This is the only study of which I am aware to report the views of the children. This second research was

Jane Carter's Doctoral study and has not yet been published. However, she gave a paper on the children's voices at the UKLA International Conference in July 2017 and on the views of the teachers in 2018. With her permission I have drawn the summary here from the power points from these two lectures. Her Doctorate can now be downloaded from https://people/uwe.ac.uk/Person/JaneCarter. The third research, published in October 2017, looked at the impact of grouping practices in primary schools on children and on educational professionals. The role of private companies in defining appropriate pedagogy is also considered. One focus in that study by Alice Bradbury and Guy Roberts-Holmes was Phonics which they claim has come to have an identity separate from Reading in the early years curriculum, possibly because of the high stakes nature of the Phonics Screening Check taken by all children at the end of Year 1 in England. This appears to have led to streaming as early as in Nursery classes. Brief reference will also be made to information gathered by the author and her team during research into baseline assessment. During this research we collected information on the characteristics of children in Reception class in three primary schools in The West Midlands. It brings alive the nature of many of the classes on which current government mandatory literacy policy and the check may now be having a major impact. One might question whether pressure on their teachers to attain a high percentage pass on the Phonics Screening Check should be a priority for teachers.

I had made a detailed study of the NFER research and reported the findings in Clark, 2016, chapter 16. I was, therefore, able to draw on that published source. I had also referred to the children's voices aspect of Jane Carter's research with quotations in Clark, 2017a: 92-93. Her more recent report on the views of the teachers became available in July 2018 after we had completed our survey. I have made a detailed study of the research report by Alice Bradbury and Guy Roberts-Holmes published in October 2017 and drawn on that. Jane Carter, Alice Bradbury and Guy Roberts-Holmes confirm that I have fairly represented their findings.

There is evidence from these researches that many of the issues commented upon by the respondents to our survey had been raised previously, many even immediately after the introduction of the check, yet have been ignored by policy makers.

I Phonic Screening Check Evaluation, Final Report

(Walker, M., Sainsbury, M., Worth, J., Bamforth, H., and Betts, H, (2015)

This section is based on chapter 16 of Clark, 2016. In June 2012, for the first time the Phonics Screening Check was administered to all Year 1 children in England. In June 2013 a further cohort of children in Year 1 sat a similar check and those children who had failed to reach an acceptable level (32 out of 40 words correct) were required to re sit the check at the end of Year 2. The DfE commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to undertake research over the period 2012-2015 to consider the impact of the check on the teaching of phonics in primary schools, on the wider literacy curriculum and on the standard of reading. An interim report was published in 2013. Clearly by this stage only some aspects of the remit could be considered. In June 2015 the final NFER Report was published (see Clark, 2016: chapter 16).

The interim report was based on case study interviews in 14 primary schools in June and July 2012; baseline surveys of 844 literacy coordinators and 940 Year 1 teachers. The final report draws on data over three timepoints. In 2014 there were interviews with staff in 19 primary schools, surveys of 573 literacy coordinators and 652 Year 1 teachers immediately after the check in June 2014. Many of the findings in the final report were anticipated in the interim report. Already at that time issues were raised about the value of the check for certain types of pupils. This included not only children with special educational needs, but also high ability pupils, those already reading and those with English as an additional language.

Year 1 teachers expressed mixed views on the value of the check, although benefits were acknowledged, in confirming the results of other assessments, and placing an emphasis on phonics teaching. However, most Year 1 and Year 2 teachers reported that phonics teaching already took place daily and on average two hours per week. Around 90 per cent of schools already taught discrete phonics sessions in Reception and Years 1 and 2. Literacy coordinators were less favourably disposed to the check than teachers, feeling that the check results do not reveal anything of which teachers were unaware. Most teachers felt the check was not suitable for children with speech, language and communication needs and children with other learning difficulties. Reference was made to the pseudo words distracting some of these children and in some case

these children struggled to communicate their answers clearly (Clark, 2016: 132).

Most teachers interviewed in the case study visits to schools reported that, 'the check would have minimal, if any impact on the standard of reading and writing in their school in the future (Clark, 2016:133).

The evaluation did not find any evidence of improvement in pupils' literacy performance, or in progress that could be clearly attributed to the check. The most frequently reported change, already in 2014, was an increase in the pace of phonics teaching and an increased focus on pseudo words (see Clark, 2016: 135). The pattern described in these analyses suggested that a strong enthusiasm for synthetic phonics and the check amongst teachers tended to be associated with higher phonics attainment as measured by the check but not with improvement in reading and writing assessment at the end of Key Stage 1.

There was little evidence to suggest that many schools had moved towards a position whereby they were teaching systematic phonics 'first and fast', to the exclusion of other word strategies. Although most schools were committed to teaching phonics, they did not apparently see this as incompatible with the teaching of other decoding strategies.

In the NFER blog in 2015 by Matt Walker, one of the authors of the report, he commented that:

In spite of these findings the government remains committed to the retention and indeed possible extension of the phonics check and related initiatives.

That research, though commissioned by DfE, appears to have been ignored by policymakers. More recent researches are still drawing attention to these same issues and in our survey many respondents commented on these same problems.

II An Illuminative evaluation of the Phonics Screening Check: listening to the voices of children and their teachers (Jane Carter)

This was the topic of Jane Carter's Doctoral research which I hope will soon be available as a publication. Jane gave a paper on the children's voices at the UKLA International Conference in 2017, and on the teachers' voices in 2018. With her permission I gave examples of comments from the children shortly after they had sat the check, based on her 2017

presentation (in Clark, 2017a: 92-93). Here I add to that evidence from her 2018 presentation at the UKLA International Conference evidence on the teachers' voices.

The children's voices to quote Jane Carter: "The group that is at the heart of the reading debate, those learning to read, have not, as yet been listened to."

I had been concerned that the views of the children on their experience of the check had not previously been explored so was pleased that Jane shared her power points with me. In her cleverly designed study, the children were the experts as they tried to explain to Beegu, a soft toy, based on the character in the children's book by Alexis Deacon how Beegu could learn to read: they were Beegu's teachers. This enabled the children, unprompted by the researcher, to talk about classroom practice including phonics, alien words and other approaches to learning to read they had experienced.

One child suggested that the purpose of books was not to read or enjoy but: 'to help you with your sounds'. Some children raised the issue of 'alien' words. Among the answers to this observation: 'they just help you with your sounds'. The children realised that in the check if a word had an alien next to it then it wasn't a real word. When asked if these words helped one child responded: 'They don't they just confuse us!'

Jane Carter stated that: 'There is widespread teaching to the test that has nothing to do with developing children as readers…and everything to do with raising test scores'. However, Carter stressed that in spite of this, in some cases the children are 'absorbing the policy voice and a passion for reading for pleasure'. Clearly the teachers were torn between raising as required the percentage pass on the check (as distinct from teaching effective phonics for reading) and providing a rich environment of literacy learning for the children. The children also recognised that many classroom practices. e.g. Treasure or Trash Words, real or not real words, were not needed. This indicated that the purpose of 'alien words; as a useful assessment tool was being misunderstood by teachers and that alien words were being taught as part of the curriculum'. In this research Jane reveals what are perhaps unintended consequences of the policy, in particular, the effect on practice in classrooms as a consequence of the current high stakes nature of the check.

The teachers' voices

Jane Carter explored the extent to which the Phonics Screening Check framed the teaching practices of being a teacher of reading. She was following up the NFER research commissioned by DfE which looked at the effects shortly after the implementation of synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading and of the introduction of the PSC in 2012 (Walker et al., 2015; Clark, 2016: chapter 16). Particularly interesting is what she refers to as possible 'Living contradictions' within the teachers' views and practices.

Jane Carter gathered data from a questionnaire in 2016 completed by 59 Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 teachers. In October 2016 she conducted focus groups in seven schools to follow up ideas and issues raised in the teacher questionnaire.

Some 57 of 59 teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that teaching phonics knowledge was essential for the teaching of reading. There were interesting contradictions, however, as 25 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'phonics should be taught fast and first before other strategies'. Yet, 51 of the 59 respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that 'phonics must be taught at the same time and alongside other strategies' and all 59 agreed or strongly agreed that teaching a range of strategies to word reading was essential. Thus, many teachers while appearing to subscribe to government policy appeared to hold views that were incompatible. Most teachers claimed to have adapted their practice to government policy (22 of 24 Year 1 teachers). What is important is that these teachers did not also say this adaptation of practice was to ensure children developed as readers – teachers saw the check as unconnected to reading. Most of the teachers said they had adapted their practice in order to improve PSC scores and this rises to all, 24 Year 1 teachers. This was explored further in the focus groups where a number of teachers referred to the need because of the check to practice alien words. One teacher commented in a focus group: "It's not a good thing to have to admit we teach to the test but we have to do it."

There were some disturbing comments made by the teachers concerning the cultural context of the classroom: "It is just so mechanised." "Pounding them with sounds." "We are ramming it down their throats."

Carter stated that whatever the teacher practices some (most) children were positive about reading and teachers

showed commitment to developing children as readers who enjoyed reading and read for pleasure. However, she suggested her research should raise the following questions for policy makers:

- For the higher attaining readers (who could pass the test at an earlier age) is being prepared for the check throughout the year a backward step?
- 'First fast and only' - so when does the 'first' period end?
- Children that 'pass' – what does this really mean in terms of current and future reading?

III Grouping in Early Years and Key Stage 1 "A Necessary Evil"?

The Final Report of this research by Alice Bradbury and Guy Roberts-Holmes was published in October 2017 (Bradbury, A. and Roberts-Holmes, G., 2017 see also Bradbury, A., 2018).

This report gives recent evidence on widespread effects of the Phonics Screening Check on classroom practices in early years classrooms in England. The research which was carried out between April and June 2017 involved a nationwide survey and interviews at four case study primary schools. There were 1373 respondents to the online survey with a spread across Reception, Years 1 and 2 and some Nursery teachers. Interviews were also conducted in four primary schools in different regions of England. No Academy schools or areas which have selection were included in the study.

The survey data revealed that grouping is most common for Phonics (76%) Reading (57%) and Literacy (54%). They found that grouping for Phonics was likely to be across the year group rather than as for Literacy and Maths within the class. In the survey it was found that 58% of 118 Nursery teachers who responded used grouping for Phonics. In Reception this rose to 81%, in Year 1 it was 78%. This grouping for Phonics declined in Year 2.

It appears that phonics was seen as a distinct subject which required specific pedagogic practices, separate from Reading. The researchers suggest that this practice was influenced by the use of Phonics schemes from private companies (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes: 18). The teachers stated that: 'because the children were aware of which group they were placed in and why, this led to reduced self-esteem

and confidence' (p. 22). In the report the effect of these groupings on the mental health of the young children, an issue raised by some teachers, is discussed.

Many survey respondents commented that this practice of grouping was determined by the Senior Management. To quote: 'This language of fear and risk indicates the high stakes nature of testing in early years and Key Stage 1'. This was it is claimed 'associated with taking preparation for tests seriously'. It is suggested that only those who were in a position of strength, either through their successful results or personal professional standing felt able to challenge the orthodoxy of grouping' (p. 30). Teachers felt under pressure to use this practice to ensure their assessment results were acceptable and many written comments summed this up. It was noted that there was widespread reluctance to inform parents, showing the extent of teachers' contradictory feelings about grouping (p. 35)

Chapter 5 in the report is devoted to what is described as an 'unexpected finding' namely the role of private companies in determining schools' grouping policies, particularly Phonics Read Write Inc which was said to be the most mentioned phonics company, which appeared to influence grouping even in schools which did not buy the actual scheme. The researchers comment that this scheme recommends that pupils are grouped across the school 'in homogenous groups'. In one case study school, children were grouped for Phonics across the school, thus some Key Stage 2 children were placed with Key Stage 1 children. As the Phonics Screening Check is an important early accountability measures for schools, teachers felt that their grouping decisions for Phonics were partly determined by these targets.

To quote from the research: "Although the Phonics Screening Check is described as a 'light-touch assessment there are consequences for both schools and pupils if the expected levels are to be met,' and grouping and interventions are seen as the solution."

Furthermore, it is suggested that this leads to resources being prioritised on the basis of improving Phonics results; this it is claimed encourages the use of external schemes such as Read Write Inc. This research found evidence of resources being distributed to focus on borderline groups while leaving those guaranteed to pass and those 'hopeless cases to one side' (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017: 6.2). Reference is made to different resources and staff being allocated to different

groups, for example lower groups being taught by teaching assistants. Mention is also made of adverse effects on the youngest children of the check and grouping. Specific attention is also drawn to intervention as a form of grouping, and in some schools, both grouping and interventions are in place.

In the light of their findings these researchers recommend that:

- Policy makers should examine whether the explicit and implicit support for grouping in policy documentation is appropriate, in the light of their stated aims of reducing gaps in attainment

- Policy makers should make the Phonics Screening Check non-statutory, because of the impact on grouping practices which, from age three, can have detrimental effects on children's wellbeing.

Finally, policy makers should also be aware of the frustration that teachers feel with Phonics companies undermining teachers' professional decision-making.

IV Contrasting patterns in three Reception classes

As part of a research into baseline assessment in 2015 and 2016 at Newman University which I directed, we gathered detailed information on Reception classes in three schools in the West Midlands. This was presented at a research seminar in February 2016 (Clark, 2017c chapter 10).

In a sample of only three primary schools, there were 16 different languages in the Reception classes in addition to English. In the four Reception classes 117 children were tested on baseline assessment in 2015, and for 52 English was not their first language. There was a year's difference in age between the oldest and young children; 26 children were born in September, October of November 2010, while 42 were born in June, July or August 2011. Already further children had entered these classes, for some of whom English was not their first language. Current education policy in England does not appear to acknowledge the importance of assessing how competent children are in their home language when they start primary school, including those whose first language is not English. I referred to new research by UNESCO, that 40% don't access education in a language they understand, and that, *A Review of 40 Countries* education plans found that less

than half recognised the important of teaching children in their home language, particularly in the early grades and that teachers are rarely prepared for the reality of bilingual classrooms` (*Education Journal,* 260: 12).

School 1. Early Excellence was used for baseline assessment in 2015. This school had a nursery class. There were 59 children (24 boys and 35 girls) in two Reception classes. Three whose first language was not English had arrived since the deadline for completion of baseline assessment.

*32 of the children assessed did not have English as their first language and there were 11 different languages spoken by the children in the Reception classes.

Urdu 11, Punjabi 13, Hindi 2, Shona 1, Romanian 1, Lithuanian 1, French 1, Bulgarian 1, Swahili 1. (plus three not assessed Portuguese 1, Lithuanian 1 and Polish 1).

16 of the children assessed were born in September to November 2010 (the oldest) and 19 were born in June, July or August (the youngest).

School 2. Early Excellence was used for baseline assessment in 2015. This school did not have a nursery class. There were 31 children (15 boys and 16 girls) in the Reception class. All these children were assessed.

*18 of children who were assessed did not have English as there first language. There were six different languages apart from English. Polish 2, French (African) 3, Tigrinyan (Eritrea) 7 Chinese 4, Estonian 1, Wolof (West African Language) 1.

Seven of the children who were assessed were born in September, October or November 2010 (the oldest and 11 were born in June, July or August 2011 (the youngest).

There were two looked after children in Reception class.

School 3. Early Excellence was used for assessment in 2015. This school did not have a nursery class. There were 30 children (14 boys and 16 girls) in Reception class and all were assessed.

*There were two children whose first language was not English, one speaks Punjabi, the other Arabic.

Three children were born in September, October or November 2010 (the oldest) and 12 children were born in June, July or August 2011 (the youngest).

*We do not have an assessment of how fluent in English these children were. It is possible that some of these children may speak more than one other language.

The detailed information from the above research on the possible characteristics of children within even a single Reception class in primary schools in England, though collected for a different purpose, is pertinent to the current debate when taken together with the other research cited here. It brings home the reality of Reception classes in many schools in England.

In a speech on 31 July 2018 at the Resolution Foundation, Damian Hinds the Secretary of State for Education, gave his vision for boosting social mobility. He stressed the importance of the home environment but also stressed the importance of Reception class: “Most pressingly it is a persistent scandal that we have children starting school and struggling to communicate, to speak in full sentences. Right now 28% of children finish their reception year without the early communication and reading skills they need to thrive.” (https://www.gov..uk/government/organisations//department-for-education) (https://gov.uk/government/people.damian-hinds)

Faced with the findings of the research reported here teachers could be forgiven for questioning whether the government’s current priorities for the teaching of reading in the early years as set out in the Ofsted Report Bold Beginnings are indeed appropriate to bridge this gap, or are evidence-based.

The researches cited here show many unintended as well as intended consequences of the Phonics Screening Check. While some of this evidence has only recently been published it is disturbing that DfE was alerted to some of the concerns of the teaching professionals soon after the Phonics Screening Check was introduced in 2012, and, in research commissioned by DfE! The new policies noted here, including baseline assessment, may have further unintended

consequences for young children during their early years in primary schools in England. It is disappointing that so little attention is paid by government either to the warnings of professionals or to research evidence other than that which appears to support government policy.

A survey of the views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents on the Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017

Background

As was noted earlier, the government in England did not involve the teaching profession in the development or planning for the implementation of what is now a high stakes statutory assessment of reading, the Phonics Screening Check, or the decision to make synthetic phonics the mandated only way to teach reading to all children in state schools. The professionals have also not been consulted as to the future of the check, whether in their view it should remain statutory, become voluntary or be abolished. Schools are judged by the Department for Education and Ofsted by the percentage pass on the Phonic Screening Check with a requirement to increase the percentage pass each year. Universities involved in teacher education are required to present synthetic phonics as the method of teaching reading and there seems no opportunity for academics to challenge this policy in their teaching, in dialogue with the Department for Education, or even with other academics. Furthermore, the funds allocated by DfE since 2012 for literacy courses and materials, which have been substantial, are with synthetic phonics at their core.

There is little evidence that the views of teachers or parents as to the effects of the check, intended and unintended, on the literacy experiences of young children in England have been sought by the government since the early research by NFER commissioned by DfE shortly after the check was introduced in 2012 The final report by NFER was published as early as 2015. Yet, it appears that the disquiet expressed by some teachers interviewed during that research was ignored by policymakers: “the effects of the check even then on classroom practice; that the check was inappropriate for many children, those who could already read and those with speech problems among others; that the check told them little they did not

already know."

Literacy coordinators were found to be even more critical of the check than teachers.

In the intervening years criticism of the check by teachers and even academics involved in teacher education has been muted. Their silence may be assumed by politicians to indicate that they are in support of the policy or are unconcerned. Further research has appeared since we planned our survey revealing disturbing effects on classroom practice in the early years as the check has moved from what was claimed to be 'a light touch diagnostic assessment' to a high stakes assessment for accountability. Attempts to achieve, as required by DfE and Ofsted, a higher percentage pass on the check each year seem in many early years classrooms in England to have led to preparation for the check dominating children's early literacy experiences.

The aim of this independent survey, preliminary results of which were reported in July 2018, was to explore the views of Head Teachers, teachers who have been involved in administering the Phonics Screening Check and parents whose children have been assessed. The response to the survey has shown that their relative silence until now should not be taken as evidence that they are uninterested or unconcerned. Not only did busy professionals and parents complete the survey but many took time to add comments. The survey was anonymous, but we have been contacted by a number of those who completed the survey who have expressed interest to be involved in further research or to provide further information. Any further research will require us to submit a new proposal to the ethics committees and would require us to seek informed consent from anyone wishing to participate.

In the final section of this article I present an outline and summary of the survey.

Outline and summary of the report on an independent enquiry into the views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents on the Phonics Screening Check

The preliminary report of this survey was published online on 6 July 2018. This has now been replaced by the final report: The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017: An independent enquiry into the views of Head Teachers, teachers and parents. Final Report September 2018. Editors Margaret M. Clark OBE,

Newman University and Jonathan Glazzard, Leeds Beckett University. This can be accessed and downloaded from: https://newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/the-phonics-screening-check-2012-2017.

In addition to Margaret M. Clark and Jonathan Glazzard the other members of the research team are Susan Atkinson of Leeds Beckett University, and John Bayley and Sue Reid of Newman University.

Outline

This was an independent survey and the results are anonymous. The aim of the survey was to enable government policy to be informed by the views of teachers and parents as to the effect of current policy on the literacy experiences of young children in primary schools in England. It was advertised nationally in England during May 2018 with links to the three survey forms, for Head Teachers who worked in schools with Year 1 classes, teachers who had assessed children, and parents whose children had been assessed on the check. Where a parent had more than one child assessed they were asked to complete the survey for the child assessed most recently.

Survey forms were returned by 230 Head Teachers, 1,348 teachers and 419 parents. While not all questions were answered by all respondents, any percentages quoted here are based on responses by at least 180 Head Teachers, 1,108 teachers and 295 parents. We had responses from all regions of England and from teachers with a wide range of experience. Most of the teachers had assessed at least 40 children on the check and 56% of the Head Teachers had themselves assessed children on the check. Unfortunately, in spite of our attempts, the responses from parents were nearly all from parents whose mother tongue is English. However, many of those parents who did respond expressed concern at the effect of the check on the literacy experiences of their children., including those whose child had passed the check.

Since 6 July, when we released our preliminary report, we have studied several other researches which reveal further evidence on the effect of current policy on children's literacy experiences, as reported by their teachers, now also by children. In our final report these findings are summarised in a new chapter 2. The findings of our survey are reported in chapters 4 to 7 and the questions and answers in Appendices V

to VII. We have added to the appendices a summary of the additional data from the more complex analyses we have now undertaken. Appendix I reveals evidence that teachers have not been consulted on the future of the check. In Appendix II we indicate how much money has been spent by DfE on the check, on commercial synthetic phonics materials and training courses. We know from our survey that many primary schools have also devoted funds to commercial materials to ensure they raise their percentage pass on the check, but there is no evidence as to how much. Appendix III reports on recent developments in Australia where it appears the Phonics Screening Check may soon be introduced in some states. In chapter 3 details of the survey are reported and Appendix IV shows the information on the survey that was circulated.

Summary of the views of Head Teachers and teachers (see chapters 4, 5 and Appendices V and VI)

The percentages of Head Teachers and teachers who answered these key questions are based on at least 180 Head Teachers and 1108 teachers, those who answered these policy related questions.

1. Do you think the phonics check provides you with information on individual children which you did not already have? No HT 89% T 94%.
2. Do you think pass/fail should be recorded for the check? No HT 71% T 75%.
3. Is it useful to re-test children in Year 2 who fail the check in Year 1? No HT 64% T 74% Do you think it is useful to have pseudo/alien words in the check? No HT 80% T 80%.
4. Do you buy commercial synthetic phonics materials or training for your school? HT Yes 46% (62 made comments). 48% of teachers used commercial materials and 215 made comments.
5. Do you think the phonics check should remain statutory? Yes HT 16% T 12% NB There were significant differences between the views of more and less experienced teachers (see Appendices).
6. To what extent do you agree with the government policy that the method of teaching reading in England to all children should be by synthetic phonics only? Agree HT 6% T 10% Disagree HT 62% (73 comments) T 47% (429 comments). There were significant differences with more experienced

teachers more likely not to agree.

Summary of views of parents (mainly based on 304 parents, see chapter 6 and Appendix VII)

1. Many of the parents had more than one child assessed.
2. Nearly half the parents who responded had a child assessed in 2017 by which time the percentage pass was high.
3. The check was passed by 75% of these children.
4. Eighty percent of the parents stated that their child had passed the check.
5. Of the parents who responded 80% stated that their child could already read with understanding when they sat the check and 85% that their child could already write recognisable words.
6. Many parents made comments in response to the questions, many expressing concern at the effect of the check, including those whose child had passed the check see chapter 6 and Appendix VII).

Many of these parents whose child was reading well at the time of the check or who passed the check still expressed negative attitudes to the check and the government policy. It would be valuable to have the views of a wider range of parents whose children have sat the check, including children who have speech, language and communication needs or other special educational needs and children who are new to English.

Implications

1. The views expressed by the teachers indicate that the government should seriously consider either discontinuing the check or at least making it voluntary.
2. *Most teachers do not agree with the pass/fail scoring on the check or the requirement that children who fail should re-sit the check.
3. *Most teachers (and many parents) do not agree with the inclusion of pseudo/ alien words in the check. This is apparent not only in their answers but also in their comments where they gave their reasons.
4. *The responses to this survey by the teachers and parents, in their answers and in the comments made to the key questions, suggests a degree of concern about current government literacy policy of which the government should now be aware.

5. *Concern was expressed both about the high stakes pass/fail Phonics Screening Check and the current mandatory requirement in England that synthetic phonics should be the only method of teaching reading to all children.

*Many Head Teachers and teachers expressed negative views on both the check and current government policy. There was a significant difference when teachers were grouped by length of service with a higher percentage of the more experienced teachers likely to express negative views. Many recently qualified teachers in England may not have been alerted to the controversial nature of some of the evidence cited by the government as Teacher Education programmes may be dominated by a focus on synthetic phonics to enable them to meet Ofsted requirements (see chapter 2). This is an area for further research.

While frequently declaring their policies 'evidence-based', evidence which does not support current policy is ignored by politicians who dictate not only what should be taught in schools, but how it must be taught. This is backed by an accountability regime which forces teachers to adhere to these policies, even if in their professional judgement they have concerns. The constrains on the curriculum in pre- and in-service courses for teachers, and allocation of large sums of money to specified materials and courses means that recently qualified teachers may not have the knowledge or expertise to challenge government policies.

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Margaret Clark also writes about PIRLS 2016 in a short article in the next section of this issue, on page 76.

Children and young people with learning disabilities: vulnerability to child sexual exploitation. Research findings to support education with prevention and response

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By Emilie Smeaton and Dr Anita Franklin

Abstract: *This article will assess how disabilities effect a child, from their vulnerabilities to their likelihood of experiencing abuse. It will look at how we can ensure the safeguarding of children with disabilities sufficiently reflects their increased risks of various kinds of abuse.*

Keywords: abuse, disabilities, vulnerability, support, exploitation.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) relates to children and young people under the age of 18 and, as outlined in government guidance to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation (DCSF, 2009)[1] : "involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receives "something" (e.g. food accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing and/or others performing on them sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example, the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect,

physical strength and/or economic or other resources."
(UK National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People, 2008)[2]

Although it is difficult to accurately state the number of young people with learning disabilities in the UK, the English government estimated that as of January 2015, 15% of all pupils in England had identified special educational needs, although in previous years the figure had been steady at 21%, the decrease being attributed to the number of children with special education needs without statements/EHC plans being on the decline (DfE, 2015).[3]

Previous research has estimated that the prevalence rate for sexual violence in young people with learning disabilities is 15 per cent, and that disabled children are between three and four times more likely to experience violence than non-disabled children (Jones et al, 2012).[4] Disabled children and young people are less likely to recognise abuse and disclose abuse, and more likely to delay disclosure, than their non-disabled peers (Hershkowitz, 2007).[5] Negative attitudes and assumptions about disabled children can disempower them and affect their confidence and self-esteem (Sobsey, 1994;[6] Briggs, 2006[7]), which can have multiple implications for safeguarding and protecting children from sexually exploitative situations.

A small number of research studies carried out in the UK report that young people with learning disabilities or difficulties constitute a significant minority of sexually exploited young people (Brodie and Pearce, 2012;[8] Smeaton, 2009[9]) and that young people with learning disabilities or difficulties are at increased risk of CSE (Beckett, 2011;[10] Smeaton, 2013[11]). The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (OCCE)'s final report concerning child sexual exploitation (CSE) in gangs and groups[12] identifies how learning disabilities are a typical vulnerability in a child prior to abuse.

Statutory guidance[13] addressing CSE in both England and Wales emphasises the role that education plays in combatting CSE. For example, the 2009 English guidance[14] notes that schools, including academies, independent schools and non-maintained special schools and further education colleges, are required under the Education Act 2002 to implement functions relating to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. In addition, the guidance states that educational establishments should be aware of CSE and able

to identify the indicators that a child or young person may be experiencing, or at risk of, CSE and know what action to take. The guidance also outlines education's role to ensure children and young people are informed about CSE and know where to seek help and advice. The Welsh guidance[15] explicitly notes the unique position of staff in educational establishments to recognise and refer to support services children who are abused through CSE, reduce their vulnerability and support children to recover.

In 2014 Comic Relief commissioned the CSE and Learning Disability Research Consortium[16] to undertake research across the UK to increase understanding of how to improve responses to children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. The study aimed to identify what is currently taking place across the UK to meet their needs and provide evidence-based recommendations to support service delivery and inform policy decisions. The research encompassed both qualitative and quantitative data collection including:

- An overview of current literature and a UK policy analysis
- Survey of local authorities/health and social care trusts
- In-depth interviews with voluntary and statutory sector professionals
- Face-to-face interviews with young people with learning disabilities who experienced, or were at risk of CSE,

It became evident during the course of the research that many of the issues which play a part in placing young people with learning disabilities at risk of CSE, were also present for young people with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Therefore it is recommended that the findings from this research are also considered with these groups of young people in mind. The research also identified concerns around young people with undiagnosed or unidentified learning disabilities, especially amongst young people with mild or moderate learning disabilities and who had not met high thresholds for learning disability support or had not received additional support at school. The article presents some of the key findings of the research[17] , and examines them in relation to education. Recommendations for education providers to improve meeting the needs of this group of children and young people are also

presented.

Key research findings

Key research findings include the following:

Factors relating to increased vulnerability to CSE

Children and young people with learning disabilities share many of the same vulnerabilities to CSE that are faced by all children and young people, but the evidence indicates that they are more vulnerable to CSE than their non-disabled peers, face additional barriers to their protection, and to receiving support to address CSE. The research identifies the following elements as contributing to this increased vulnerability:

- impairment-related factors including understanding of consent including how to give, seek and receive consent to sexual activity, difficulties in recognising exploitation or risk, impulsive behaviours and needs associated with a different understanding of social interaction and communication
- societal treatment of young people with learning disabilities, including overprotection, disempowerment, isolation and false perceptions that young people with learning disabilities do not have the same needs, wishes and desires to have a relationship as all young people, and/or that they cannot be sexually exploited
- the lack of training received by professionals addressing CSE and learning disabilities
- the infantilisation of many young people with learning disabilities, whereby they are treated as young children and not allowed to take risks and experience the same opportunities as their peers
- the social isolation of this group of young people
- their lack of access to information and education on sex and relationships which they can understand and apply to their own situation.

While noting the benefits that technological developments can bring to the lives of children and young people with learning disabilities, the research also identifies that this group are particularly vulnerable to online grooming and sexual exploitation – often because their isolation leads them to seek friends and relationships online. This reinforces the need for children and young people with learning disabilities to receive

good advice about internet safety as part of preventative measures.

This research highlights that further consideration should be given to children and young people with learning disabilities placed in residential care across the UK to protect them from CSE. Steps should be taken to ensure that more robust and effective safeguarding measures are established for those placed in 52-week residential schools settings funded through education, and in other settings, where children and young people may not have regular, or any, contact with social care or other outside services.

Challenges to identifying numbers of children and young people with learning disabilities affected by CSE

There are a number of challenges to identifying numbers of children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE across the UK which are exacerbated by:

- The invisibility of children and young people with learning disabilities to services because of the high threshold for eligibility.
- The widespread lack of diagnosis and assessment of learning disabilities and other conditions such as ASC.
- The lack of understanding of both CSE and learning disabilities among some professionals
- The absence of a shared terminology relating to learning disabilities and/or learning difficulties
- The general lack of data collection and information-sharing relating to the sexual exploitation of children and young people with learning disabilities.

Diagnosis and a lack of quality assessments for young people with learning disabilities

Diagnosis issues or a lack of quality assessment can affect meeting the needs of children and young people with learning disabilities, ASC, ADHD and learning difficulties such as dyspraxia and dyslexia who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. The evidence suggests that many children and young people who have moderate learning disabilities or learning difficulties, or are possibly on the autistic spectrum, have never received a formal diagnosis or assessment of need. Young people who

participated in the research clearly articulated how the lack of recognition that they have a learning disability or ASC can be problematic, leading to frustration and also to others viewing them as exhibiting 'challenging' behaviour. For some, problems at school led them to cease engaging in education or being excluded, which further increases their vulnerability to CSE. Even when a young person has received a diagnosis or proper assessment, they do not always receive services to meet their needs. Some professionals might not understand the impairment and attribute some behaviours to being 'disruptive', particularly within school: *"I had to go to loads of different schools because I was just getting kick out [of school] all the time. … I wasn't going to lessons; just wasn't listening really. I was in trouble [at school] all the time, swearing at teachers; … getting into fights. And because school staff didn't understand [that I had Asperger syndrome], I was just called a naughty child."* (Emma, aged 18)

Raising awareness of the sexual exploitation of children and young people with learning disabilities

The research reveals the fundamental need to improve awareness-raising of the sexual exploitation of children and young people with learning disabilities to ensure their needs become visible. Awareness-raising activities should include professionals, advocacy and faith groups, and the wider community, including the business community. There is also a lack of specific awareness-raising activities for young people with learning disabilities and their families.

Improving multi-agency responses

Effective multi-agency approaches that include education in both strategic and operational CSE forums are crucial to adequately responding to children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. Whilst a small number of local authorities have a CSE lead with responsibility for joint working with disability services, many local areas reported a lack of representation from disability services at multi-agency strategic or operational forums and there is often a lack of attendance from disability services at local CSE training.

Lack of professional understanding and awareness of CSE and learning disabilities

The research identifies that there remain significant gaps in

professionals' knowledge of both CSE and learning disabilities and of how best to meet the needs of children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. The need for multi-agency training at a local level for all professionals whose work includes responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of young people and their families is highlighted in the research as a priority. The current lack of training can directly affect the identification of, and support made available to, children and young people with learning disabilities who are at risk of, or experiencing, CSE. A lack of knowledge and understanding of CSE, learning disabilities, ASC and ADHD can lead professionals to view some children and young people with these impairments who experience CSE as having 'challenging behaviour' and as a 'management problem', rather than recognising that this masks their vulnerability, or is an outward sign that sexual exploitation is occurring. This perception of these individuals being 'challenging' can result in diverting attention from supporting their CSE or learning needs: *"The young person had a history of sexual abuse, as well as different forms of sexual exploitation, and the head teacher just couldn't seem to see the trauma and how that affected the young person and just viewed her behaviour really negatively."* (Specialist CSE professional)

It is very important for those working in education to be trained in CSE and to be able to 'spot the signs', raise concerns and work with agencies to help them communicate with and support children and young people with learning disabilities.

Preventative work to improve knowledge, awareness and understanding of CSE among children and young people with learning disabilities

Preventative work with children and young people with learning disabilities in educational establishments is an important part of safeguarding this group from CSE. The following factors were identified as being particularly successful in preventative work in special schools with young people with learning disabilities and could also work well within a mainstream setting:

- A well-established relationship between the project delivering CSE preventative work and the special school.
- The professional delivering the CSE preventative work has extensive experience of working with young people with learning disabilities.
- The class teacher providing expert support in

developing the resources.

- Young people who participate in the preventative programme being of a similar age.

Supporting children and young people with learning disabilities to disclose CSE

Previous research identifies specific barriers faced by disabled children and young people relating to disclosure and professionals' identification of their abuse. This research provides further evidence of this, indicating that these children and young people may not report CSE because they do not know they are being sexually exploited, and they may fear 'getting into trouble'. Perpetrators of CSE also used the child's low self-esteem and negative perception of their learning disability as a way to groom and then silence them. The evidence also indicates that some adults, including professionals, are not proactively identifying potential signs of CSE, thus placing a burden on children and young people with learning disabilities to recognise and disclose that they have been sexually exploited.

Young people's descriptions of their disclosure of CSE revealed how professionals sometimes did not ask about their experiences of risk or relationships. Disclosures of CSE are often made after a professional has built a relationship over a long period of time, based on trust and listening to the young person, thus reinforcing the importance of long-term support for children and young people affected by CSE. This emphasises the need for professionals to ensure that they not only undertake a thorough assessment of children and young people's needs and circumstances, but also present themselves in such a way that a child or young person feels comfortable talking to them. The research identified that risk and relationships do not generally form an element of a child's plan (education, health or care) and thus young people with learning disabilities are often not informed, equipped or empowered to deal with relationships.

Lack of sex and relationships education and accessible information

Young people and professionals who contributed to the research highlighted a general lack of attention to sex and relationships education. This was viewed as reflective of a general perception of young people with learning disabilities that tends to deny their sexuality, or not see them as displaying

'typical' teenager behaviour in terms of exploring relationships and sex. It was also reported to be linked to disbelief that children and young people with learning disabilities might become victims of sexual abuse: *"I worked with some young people in a special school for young people with learning disabilities and they were 17, 18 and even 19 and they said it was the first time anyone had ever had a conversation with them about sex. It was always poo-pooed as if people with learning disabilities don't have sexual relationships."* (Specialist CSE professional)

It was suggested that the lack of sex and relationships education could partly be because children and young people with learning disabilities are not always present for sex and relationships education classes, as this time is often used for catching up on other lessons. In addition, education professionals in special and mainstream schools do not always have the materials or expertise to work on sex and relationships issues with children and young people with learning disabilities. There is therefore a need to ensure that all children and young people, including those with learning disabilities, receive sex and relationships education that is delivered in a accessible and age-appropriate manner that meets their communication and learning needs. The lack of basic understanding of sex and what constitutes abuse by some children and young people with learning disabilities was thought to be particularly problematic in relation to protection from CSE. The need for children and young people with learning disabilities to understand what sex is and understand their own bodies was identified as a basic requirement before any further sex and relationships education can take place.

The minority of young people who had received sex education reported that this had not adequately covered relationship issues and how they can potentially be exploitative. Some of the young males who participated in the research had questions and unmet needs relating to their sexuality or sexual orientation and did not know where to go to find information. This led them to seek information online and risky situations and exploitation occurred because they had not been taught how to protect themselves.

It was noted that good-quality sex and relationships education can only be delivered by paying full attention to understanding choice and consent, with recognition that the ability to assert and choose can be very challenging for some individuals with learning disabilities.

Young people's experiences of responses from education

A number of young people who participated in the research reported that their impairment and/or learning needs had not been recognised and that support had not been forthcoming for them. They spoke at length about the impact that this had had on their lives, especially in school, and they often made connections between this and going missing, or getting into trouble and subsequent sexual exploitation. Young people stated that often children and young people with learning disabilities require better support at school and improved recognition of their needs: *"I learnt nothing about grooming in my primary school or grammar school. … This stuff isn't common sense; I didn't know that there was a variety of grooming and that boys could be groomed and girls can be groomers or that it happens in gangs. I thought grooming was like 'dog grooming'."* (Misha, aged 15)

"*They should talk to kids about it (CSE) and make sure it doesn't happen to them."* (Lizzie, aged 17)

Young people felt that schools should do more to provide information, and teach young people, about:

- grooming
- abuse and exploitation
- how to keep safe in the 'real world'
- keeping safe on the internet
- safe and positive relationships
- where to go for help and support in areas such as their sexual health or sexuality
- where to go if they have concerns about their safety and welfare.

Responses from education to the sexual exploitation of children and young people with learning disabilities

The research findings highlight the need for all educational provision – mainstream and special schools and colleges - to become more involved in the CSE agenda. This engagement should cover both preventative measures and helping to identify children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. There was a consensus

amongst professionals who participated in the research that more work should be done in schools and with schools-based professionals to encourage them to acknowledge the importance of CSE, alongside a suggestion that schools are in an ideal position to identify young people with learning disabilities who might be at risk.

Some professionals suggested that there is still a taboo in some educational establishments around young people with learning disabilities, sexuality and sexual exploitation based upon a defensiveness and resistance that a young person in their school could be involved in sexual exploitation or be interested in sex.

Specialist CSE professionals gave examples of how, when they had worked with children and young people in special schools, it had become apparent that sex and sexual relationships had not previously been discussed with them.

Examples of good practice in educational settings

The research revealed examples of good practice in educational settings including:

- A special school in England that is developing a model of PSHE highlighting the sexual exploitation of young people with learning disabilities by producing a short film that focuses on the communication needs of a young person, their relationship choices and how those relationship choices are made.

- Residential schools using educational psychologists to help with putting their PSHE packages together – for example, leading to more visual prompts being included and less narrative to support children and young people with learning disabilities to understand what is, and is not, acceptable within sexual relationships.

- A specialist education college for young people with complex needs investing in training for college staff to raise awareness of CSE and a commitment to keeping CSE high on the agenda.

- A secondary school that had prioritised raising awareness of CSE in PSHE sessions.

- Ensuring services/projects delivering CSE preventative work are provided in advance information about the learning needs of young people.

Evidence-based recommendations[18]

The research provided a number of evidence-based recommendations to improve meeting the needs of children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE:

Meeting the needs of individual children and young people

Responses to children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE should focus on meeting their individual needs. This should include needs relating to both diagnosed learning disabilities and the assessment of suspected learning disabilities. It is important to not treat all children and young people the same just because they share an impairment label. The spectrum of learning disabilities and autistic spectrum conditions (ASC), for example, means that children and young people can have different needs and experience the world in very different ways.

Listening to young people with learning disabilities

Underpinning the research findings is the need to listen to children and young people with learning disabilities. The evidence highlights how protection must start with listening to them and providing early support to prevent CSE.

Improving legislation, policy and guidance

Governments and local authorities must ensure development, revision and implementation of legislation, policy and guidance to meet the needs of children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE.

Effective multi-agency responses

Multi-agency arrangements must lead to an effective response to children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. All Local Safeguarding Children Boards, child protection committees, regional safeguarding children boards and safeguarding panels should ensure that key agencies, including education, identify a

designated strategic and operational CSE lead for disabled children and young people.

Raising awareness

CSE campaigns and awareness-raising activities at national and local levels should include a focus on children and young people with learning disabilities and be aimed at all stakeholder groups, in order to raise awareness of the sexual exploitation of this group and encourage action to improve protection.

Governments and local agencies, including education providers, should take an active role in raising awareness of CSE among children and young people with learning disabilities and their parents and carers, and equip and empower them with the skills and knowledge to keep safe and seek help.

Provision of sex and relationship education

All educational establishments should provide high-quality, age-appropriate sex and relationships education, including same-sex relationships, with information adapted and made accessible. This should form part of a whole-school approach to child protection that includes information about internet safety, awareness of sexual exploitation and when to give, obtain or refuse consent.

Information and guidance on sex, relationships, keeping safe and risk-taking must form part of every child's plan (education, health and/or care plan) and associated support, in order to help young people with learning disabilities to build their understanding, knowledge and confidence, and reduce social isolation. This should form part of a life course approach to supporting young people with learning disabilities as they grow into adulthood.

Training

There is evidence-based learning for the following recommendations in relation to training for professionals including those based in education:

1. Pre-training curricula for those professions that include working with children, young people and their families should include both CSE and learning disabilities.

2. Induction for professionals whose work involves children, young people and families should be augmented with

topics on learning disability and CSE.

3. Improved multi-agency training on both CSE and learning disabilities should be incorporated into existing training delivered at a local level to all professionals whose work includes responsibility for the safety and welfare of children and young people.

4. CSE awareness training should be provided for workers who have regular contact with young people with learning disabilities and their families (including personal care assistants, staff in special schools, volunteers, residential school and care staff, and medical care staff).

Inspection activities to meaningfully include children and young people with learning disabilities

Regulatory bodies including those for education should ensure that all inspections, including those relating to child protection or CSE, incorporate a focus on responses to children and young people with learning disabilities. All inspection work should appropriately and meaningfully include young people with learning disabilities to ensure their views inform practice and policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Concluding comments

Children and young people with learning disabilities have an increased risk to CSE than their non-disabled peers. Education is a key partner in multi-agency strategic and operational responses to children and young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE. Education's engagement in the CSE agenda can provide an important contribution to effective multi-agency responses to preventing CSE, identifying children and young with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, CSE and supporting this group. Education providers play a crucial role in ensuring children and young people with people are provided with appropriate and accessible sex and relationships education, and other information, and education-based professionals should be enabled to 'spot the signs' of CSE, respond appropriately to children and young people's disclosures of CSE, raise concerns and work effectively with other service providers to meet individual needs.

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[17] The full research report can be accessed at: www.barnardos.org.uk/cse-learning-disabilities The accompanying practice guide for professionals, including education providers working with children and their families, can be found at: www.barnardos.org.uk/CSE_ld_practice-guide.pdf

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A review on sociocultural competence in French as a foreign language

Miguel Alejandro Fernández Torres and Deyse Matilde Fernández Gonzalez

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Abstract: *Learning a foreign language includes also learning its culture. The authors´ experience as French language learners has proved that in the development of communicative competence in French language, some areas have been practiced less than others; that is the case of the sociocultural competence. This area or competence has been poorly treated by teachers and syllabuses; even when following the popularly used communicative approach. Thus, it is the authors intention to reflect on the importance of the sociocultural competence within the communicative competence in French language.*

Key words: communicative competence, sociocultural competence, communicative approach, foreign language, culture, linguistics.

The teaching of French as a foreign language is a real need across the globe. The main reason is the great importance that this language has acquired as a means of communication among all the countries around the world nowadays. Therefore, speaking French is an advantage on the international job market, since this is the international language of cooking, fashion, theatre, the visual arts, ballet and architecture. The so-called “Language of Love” offers access to great works of literature in their original language, as well as films and songs. It is both a working language and one of the official languages of many important international institutions and organizations such as: The United Nations, the European

Union, UNESCO, NATO, the International Olympic Committee, the International Red Cross and international courts.

French is an excellent premise and good base for learning other Romance languages, such as Italian and Portuguese; also for the learning of English, since fifty per cent of current English vocabulary is from French origin. French is one of the very few languages which is spoken in almost every region of the world, there are currently over 220 million French speakers worldwide, including 72 million so-called ´´partial French speakers´´, French is thus the second most widely learned foreign language in the world.

Communicative competence:

The communicative approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching is to develop "communicative competence".[1] Hymes coined this term in order to contrast a communicative view of language and Chomsky´s theory of competence.[2] Chomsky held that linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention and interests, and errors.

The communicative approach was the attention center because the grammatical structure was subordinated to a communicative purpose. It was a connection between culture and society. This approach outlines the necessity of developing the sociocultural practice in the students. Late in the 70s, there were many advantages because in foreign languages there were included aspects related to socio cultural knowledge. Nowadays, it appears as an objective of the teaching learning process.[3]

The communicative approach is an analytical approach. It presents to the students samples of language at the text level and it promotes the students analysis from the text level to the word and the phonemic level. It proceeds this way both in the teaching of the language system and in the teaching of comprehension and communication processes, which allows the pupils to learn all the dimensions present in the language system: form, meaning and use; it also develops oral and written communication strategies that are required to use the language in real-life situations and to keep on learning by

themselves.

Communicative Competence is a term in Linguistics which refers to the language user's knowledge on grammar, syntax, morphology, phonology and the like; as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. Communicative competence is also understood as the capacity that should be developed in the students to produce and process written or oral texts in a coherent way.[4]

Communicative competence is described as a conjunction of competencies closely related whose components are:

1- Linguistic or grammatical competence: It refers to the degree to which the language user has mastered the linguistic code.

2- Sociolinguistic competence: It addresses the extent to which grammatical forms can be used or understood appropriately in various contexts to convey specific communicative functions.

3- Discourse competence: It involves the ability to combine ideas to achieve cohesion in form and coherence in thought.

4- Strategic competence: It involves the use of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to compensate for gaps in the user's knowledge of the language code, or for a breakdown in communication.

5- Sociocultural Competence: It implies the ability to understand the cultural meaning underlying linguistic forms and to understand the culture of the people whose language is being studied.[5]

Sociocultural Competence:

It is the notion of appropriateness in communication, which adds up to those of correctness, accuracy, and coherence, conveyed by the other areas. Being appropriate in the use of the language means efficiently adapting verbal or non-verbal behaviour to the specific sociocultural context where each communication act takes place. This implies taking into account who you are communicating with, what your relationship with that person is, where, how, and when the communication act

takes place, and what its purpose is; in order to make the appropriate choices in terms of topics, gestures, proximity, timing, degree of formality´´.[6]

Why to develop sociocultural competence in the students?

Intercultural communicative competence in foreign language teaching involves paying close attention to the sociocultural component of language, owing to the well-known intrinsic relationship between language and culture. This acquires a particular dimension in the teaching and learning process of foreign languages, where students need to be trained in notions of the target culture's customs, habits, and the like; when communicating in the foreign language.

The sociocultural area incorporates the notion of appropriateness in communication, being appropriate might seem relatively easy when communication takes place between interlocutors who share the sociocultural background; but, on the other hand, it might turn very challenging, and it actually does, when the ones involved belong to different cultural groups. Misunderstandings are very likely to happen during intercultural communication, even when each part manages to be coherent and accurate in the use of the other's language system. One could be accurate and coherent in the target language and still be inappropriate. The resultant break in communication and the accompanying embarrassment, discomfort, resentment, or even anger; are enough reasons to highlight the importance of integrating sociocultural contents into any foreign- or second-language-learning syllabus. Learning about what topics are considered safe or non-safe by a given cultural group, what gestures might convey an unpleasant or rude meaning for them, what distance they keep from each other when communicating, what words or phrases are too formal or too colloquial for the occasion, and the like; provides the learners with significant tools to join accuracy and coherence in attaining successful communication.[7]

Conclusions:

The rapid increase of globalization and the intensive development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) on today's society, have made peoples and cultures closer. Hence it is a real need to form students' attitudes

towards foreign languages, as a phenomenon of social and cultural reality. The sociocultural competence, along with the other competencies, will allow users of the target language be accurate and appropriate; imperative elements to be communicatively competent in a wider scope.

Annex: Model of a sociocultural lesson.
Leçon 2
Thème : Panorama général sur La France.
Type : Présentation.
Durée : 45 minutes.
Matériel : Des images, le tableau, des diapos.
Grammaire : Les Adjectifs Interrogatifs : Quel, Quels, Quelle, Quelles.
Objectif : À la fin de cette leçon les élèves devront se familiariser avec le panorama général de La France à travers des exercices oraux et écrits qu´ils vont réaliser individuellement et en couple, pour renforcer leur culture générale.
Mise en train :
1- Saluer.
2- Organiser la salle de classe pour travailler.
3- Faire l´appelle.
4- Écrire la date.
5- Vérifier le devoir de la classe passée.
6- Écrire le thème.
Le prof demande aux élèves des questions pour vérifier s´ils ont quelques notions sur La France.
Qu'est-ce que vous connaissez sur La France ?
Noter au tableau les hypothèses des élèves pour comparer après.
Déroulement :
Exercice # 1
Faire, en couples un jeu de rôles pour pratiquer le dialogue oralement.
Dialogue :
M : Bonjour Pierre. P : Bonjour Marine.
M : Où se localise La France ? P : La France est en Europe.
M : Quel est le nom officiel du pays ? P : C´est République Française.
M : Quelle est la capitale ? P : La capitale est Paris.

M : Quelle est la langue officielle ? P : La langue officielle c´est le Français.
M : Quelle est la monnaie du pays ? P : C´est l´euro.
M : Qui est le président français ? P : Le président est François Hollande.
M : Merci. P : De rien.
M : Au revoir. P : A bien tôt.

Procédure : Les apprenants vont développer, en couples, un jeu de rôles pour pratiquer le dialogue oralement. Tandis que les élèves pratiquent le prof se promène autour de la classe de couple en couple pour les aider, le prof joue le rôle de guide de l'activité. Finalement le meilleur couple va jouer la scène en face de la classe.
Après le prof montre aux élèves des images que gardent relation avec le contenu du dialogue.
Exercice # 2
Complétez les phrases avec l´information du dialogue antérieur.
A. La France se localise en -----.
B. Le nom officiel du pays est -------.
C. La capitale est -------.
D. La langue officielle est le ------.
E. L´----- est la monnaie française.
F. Le président français s´appelle ------.
Procédure : Dans cette activité les élèves vont travailler individuellement pour faire la compréhension du dialogue de l´exercice 1, en complétant des phrases sur le contenu du dialogue. Tandis que les élèves font l´exercice, le prof vérifie autour de la salle de classe le travail des élèves, il contrôle l´activité et corrige les erreurs.
Grammaire : Les Adjectifs Interrogatifs.
Les Adjectifs Interrogatifs sont : Quel, Quelle, Quels, Quelles.
Les adjectifs interrogatifs précèdent le nom ou le verbe être et font la concordance en genre et nombre avec le nom qu´ils modifient, ils marquent l'interrogation.
Quel = masculin singulier
Quels = masculin pluriel
Quelle = féminin singulier
Quelles = féminin pluriel
Cherchez dans le dialogue pur voir s'il y a quelque adjectif interrogatif.
Exemples :
Quel est le drapeau de La Francophonie ?

Quels livres lisez-vous ?
Quelle est la langue officielle en France ?
Quelles sont tes chansons préférées ?
Exercice # 3
Complétez les phrases avec les adjectifs interrogatifs correspondants.
A. ------ couleur préférez-vous ?
B. ------ est ton numéro de téléphone ?
C. ------ femmes viennent à la fête ?
D. ------ films vous aimés ?
E. ------ est votre profession ?
Procédure : Dans cette activité les élèves vont travailler individuellement pour employer les adjectifs interrogatifs correspondants. Tandis que les élèves font l´exercice, le prof vérifie autour de la salle de classe le travail des élèves, il contrôle l´activité et corrige les erreurs.
Conclusion :
Le prof demande aux élèves de faire une raconté de ce qu´ils ont appris dans la leçon.
Le prof demande aux élèves s´ils ont aimé la leçon et pourquoi.
Le prof demande aux élèves de s´évaluer eux-mêmes.
Devoir:
Demandez à vos parents sur les symboles nationaux de La France.

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Safeguarding pressures phase 6

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Abstract: *ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research has provided evidence of changes in demand and delivery of children's early help, social care and associated services since 2010 (ADCS, 2010a). Phase 6 now brings the evidence base up to date in the current context in which children's services are operating. Evidence has been collected from 140 local authorities; 21 interviews with directors of children's services or assistant directors and four case studies. Data have been extrapolated from responses to provide estimates across all local authorities in England. We evidence that in the past ten years (2008 to 2018) there has been a growing interdependence and converging of pressures on children and families resulting in their need for support from statutory services.*

Keywords: safeguarding, early years, social care, children's services, families, support.

Consideration of the nation-wide context, the common drivers apparent to some degree everywhere, and local authority specific pressures is critical to understanding changes in the needs of children and their families, in demand for services, and the delivery of services.

A national policy timeline from 2007 to 2023 on the ADCS website illustrates the complex and 'busy' landscape of events, reviews, and legislation which impact upon children's services.

Demographic and economic factors

There were 11.87 million children aged 0-17 in England in 2017, just under three quarters of a million children (6.4%)

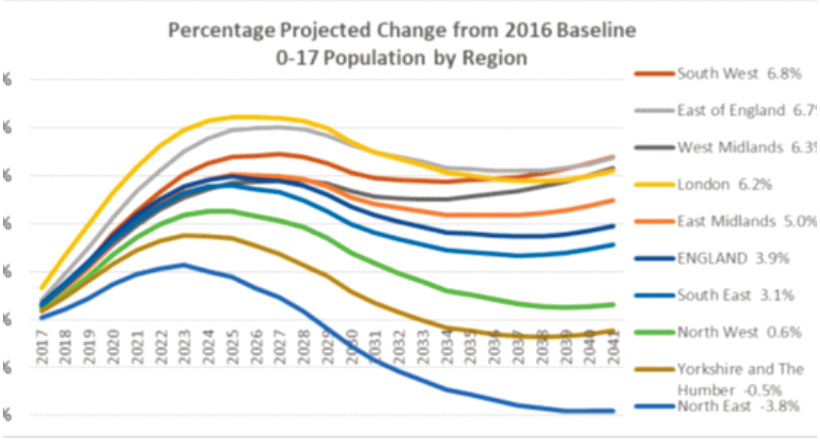

Figure 1 – Projected population change by region

more than ten years ago (ONS, 2018a). Growth in population accounts for some, but not all, of the increase in demand for services. Population is projected to increase further to 12.5 million children in 2025, but there are regional variations.

In addition to the child population, there are 4.8 million young people aged 18-24 in England and although population predictions show an overall 7% decrease between 2016 and 2025, it is likely that the proportion of young people who are supported by children's services in this age group will increase. This will be driven by the increase in numbers of children looked after (including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) who go on to become care leavers, and the number of children with an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan, the education component of which continue until the age of 25.

Changes in population due to people moving into and out of a local authority area, either through internal or international migration is also a factor affecting demand for children's services, most notably a high proportion of families in temporary accommodation
migrating out of London.

Some 66% of all children in relative poverty are living in working households. Welfare reforms, and the lack of affordable, secure housing are having a disproportionate
impact on vulnerable families and have increased the numbers of children living in poverty and at risk of adverse childhood experiences.

These factors are reported by respondents to be a primary cause of increased demand for early help and social

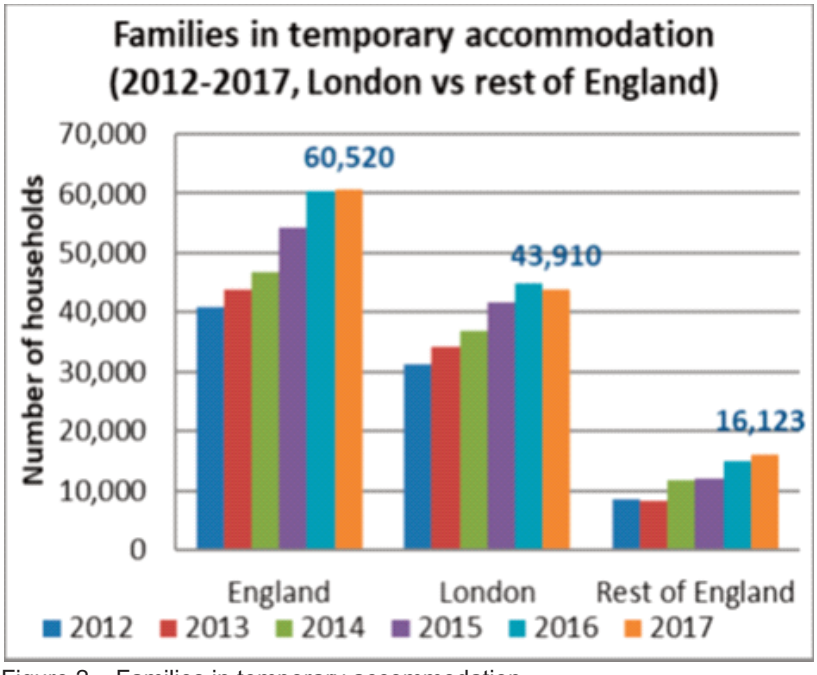

Figure 2 – Families in temporary accommodation

care services. Kelly et al (2018) conclude that benefit reforms implemented since 2015 (including the forthcoming roll-out of Universal Credit) will, if fully implemented, further reduce the incomes of low-income families with children by between 10% and 15% relative to a situation where no reforms are made.

Parental needs

The unmet needs of parents are adversely impacting upon the safeguarding and wellbeing of children. The impact of, and increase in, factors affecting parenting capacity was reported by respondents to be one of the biggest changes in the last two years, often resulting in highly complex work to redress acts of omission in parenting. Adults experiencing domestic violence, mental health difficulties or substance misuse, formerly known as the 'toxic trio' and now 'trigger trio', remain prevalent risk factors in children's lives.

Parental mental ill-health and parental alcohol and drug misuse are increasing. Of all parental factors, domestic abuse was cited as the most prevalent, and is a prominent factor in re-referral of children to children's social care services.

Where authorities had quantified the change in domestic abuse:

• 22% increase in the last year.
• 20% increase in incidences of domestic abuse as a primary factor in assessments.
• Present in 50% of referrals.
• 69% of the children becoming looked after had experienced domestic abuse whilst
living at home.
• The numbers of calls recorded as a crime by police has doubled in the last two years.

Universal services

There is evidence of a clear ripple effect felt by local authority children's services stemming from changes to universal provision, such as schools and other partner agencies, who are also experiencing significant pressures. School academisation, together with severe reductions in funding and subsequent cuts in services provided by other agencies have resulted in increased demand for local authority children's services.

Authorities reported that national Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms, and schools 'off rolling' pupils add to pressures in children's services and are an increasing concern. Some, but not all, children who are electively home educated were also cited as being of significant safeguarding and academic concerns.

Early help

The current framework for the inspection of local authority children's services (Ofsted, 2018) describes the evaluation criteria for early help as: *"Children, young people and families are offered help when needs and/or concerns are first identified. The early help improves the child's situation and supports sustainable progress. The interface between early help and statutory work is clearly and effectively differentiated".*

Early help has a significant part to play in supporting children and families although the rate of early help assessments declined in 2017/18. More notably, there were the equivalent of 164,400 cases open to early help at 31st March 2018. 78% of respondents stated that they have experienced an increase in early help activity while 13% reported a decrease.

The biggest changes in early help activity in the past two years were largely similar to those experienced in children's social care in terms of the presenting issues and increased

complexity. The reconfiguration and refocusing of early help services continue to be a key part of wider organisational transformation for many local authorities.

Nearly half of respondents stated that they have remodelled or changed their early help provision in the last two years, either to better align with children's social work, reduce costs and to maximise efficiency, in order to provide improved and more targeted support to children and families. But, there were also examples of authorities where a reduction in local authority funding has meant that there has been a reduction in, for example, single agency early help.

Work with children and families happens in complex multi-agency systems, with many variables making it very difficult to evaluate the impact of early help across the system, as well as the impact of specific interventions on improving outcomes for children and their families (Ofsted, 2015).

Respondents were clear that early help is not a quick fix, there is a general consensus that it takes 18-36 months to see any positive signs of sustainable change for children and families. Thus, short term, cashable savings are not realistic. Early help is not simply a demand management tool to reduce children's social care statutory interventions. Rather, it provides a much wider range of support to families who otherwise may never come to the attention of children's social care, but for whom positive impacts on life chances and outcomes may be seen later in adulthood – as one respondent put it – "early help for life".

Of those authorities who reported some specific impacts of early help (in addition to improving immediate and longer term outcomes for children and their families), the majority cited: diverting referrals from social care; reducing re-referrals; diverting children from care or child protection; and, edge of care services or other services provided below the threshold for statutory work.

Children's social care activity

Rates per 10,000 children, as well as the number of children known to children's social care, have increased. This signifies that the rises in activity are over and above that which might be expected from the growth in the child population alone.

Over the ten-year period covered by the six phases of ADCS Safeguarding Pressures research, there have been significant increases in initial contacts (+78%), referrals (+22%), section

47s (+159%), children subjects of child protection plans (+87%) and children looked after (+24%). Increases in 2017/18 have been greater than the previous year.

Nationally published data (DfE, 2017) evidences that approximately twice as many children will be receiving services at any time during the year than the commonly used snapshot figure at 31 March. As with all 'snapshot' figures about service users, the number at 31 March does not represent the volume of work undertaken across children's social care during the 12-month period.

Initial contacts

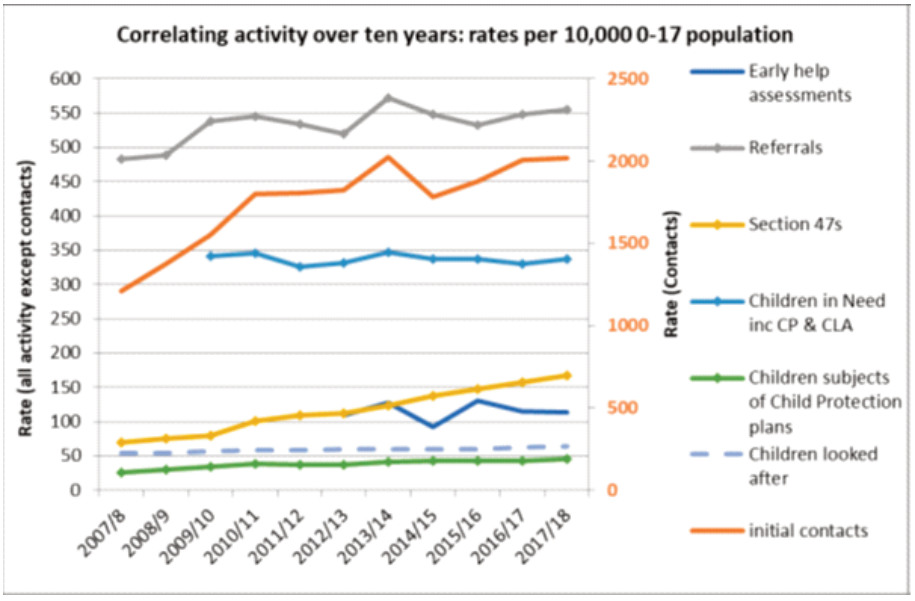

Figure 3 – Rates per 10,000 0-17 population in 2017/

An estimated 2.4 million initial contacts were received in England 2017/18. Both the number, and the rate per 10,000 of the 0-17 population, have increased across social care activity.

Referrals

We estimate that 659,550 referrals were made to children's social care in 2017/18. Police remain the largest referrers (28.6%) to children's social care, although referrals from Education have almost doubled in the past ten years, with fewer

'self-referrals' from a child/parent. The most prevalent reasons for referral are abuse or neglect (55%), which have almost doubled in the past ten years as well.

In the 137 responding authorities, the most prevalent factors in assessment following referral were:

Children in need

There were an estimated 400,300 children in need in England at 31 March 2018. In responding authorities, 64% of children in need episodes in the year were closed within three months of being referred. Many authorities are funding families in need because the family has no recourse to public funds; 37 authorities reported a collective spend between them of £29.4m on 1,867 such families in 2017/18.

Child protection

There were an estimated 198,900 section 47 enquiries during the year and 54,700 children subjects of a child protection plan in England at 31 March 2018. Section 47 enquiries and the number of children who are subjects of child protection plans continue to increase year-on-year. There are variations between authorities, although twice as many saw an increase rather than a decrease in the number of plans. There are now more older

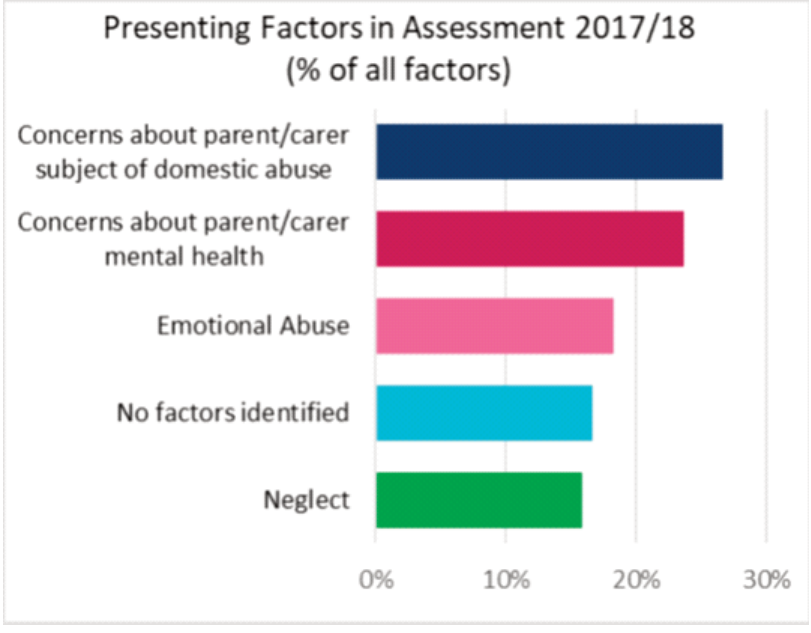

Figure 4 – Presenting factors in assessment

children (age 16-17) becoming subjects of a plan. Half of all child protection plans are categorised as Neglect, an increase from previous phases of this research.

This demand for services is a result of various and often entrenched societal and individual factors that authorities cannot stem, despite creative transformation programmes, new ways of working and a clear focus on 'getting it right' for all children.

Children looked after

There were an estimated 75,480 children looked after in England at 31 March 2018. Legislative changes, new case law and insufficiency of placements for children looked after have been challenging for local authorities. Transformation programmes, including edge of care services, were reported to be effective in meeting children's needs earlier, although there is recognition that change takes time, and there will always be some children and young people for whom care is the best option.

Not all local authorities experienced an increase in the number of children looked after in 2017/18. Of the 119 authorities providing data in both phases 5 and 6, the number of children looked after at 31 March increased in 88 authorities (74%) and reduced in 31 authorities (26%). 12.7% of children starting to be looked after in 2017/18 had been looked after previously. More children are looked after due to Abuse or Neglect than for any other reason.

Placements

Almost three quarters of all children looked after at 31 March 2018 lived with foster carers. 53% of all children looked after were in placements provided by their own local authority, and 34% in private provision such as external residential and Independent

Fostering Agency placements.

The cost, and lack of suitable placements is one of the biggest challenges and financial pressures cited by respondents, despite commissioners continuing to develop partnerships and find solutions. This is particularly the case for older children, who often have more complex needs and interlocking vulnerabilities, sometimes resulting in need for welfare secure or tier 4 mental health placements – the availability of which are

severely limited.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

There were 3,987 UASC in 133 responding LAs, which extrapolates to 4,390 UASC in England and represents an increase of 60% from 2010/11. The variation between local authorities in the numbers of UASC supported is evident in the age profile of children looked after; the majority of UASCs are aged 16 or 17 when they arrive in this country.

Some local authorities have seen a reduction in UASCs and some an increase in numbers due to the implementation of the voluntary National Transfer Scheme. Spontaneous arrivals of UASC continue, with new entry points emerging, such as Poole and Portsmouth, bringing new pressures for those local authorities affected.

For the first time in phase 6, we collected information about the number of UASC who are care leavers at 31 March 2018. 124 authorities reported 4,202 care leavers – a rate of 4.34 per 10,000 and 5,150 extrapolated to all England. UASC care leavers numbers were reported by respondents to represent a huge pressure given that Home Office funding level for UASC care leavers is significantly lower than for UASC aged 0-17.

The challenges of meeting the specific and often complex needs of asylum seeking and refugee children have been exacerbated by insufficient levels of Home Office funding. LGA evidenced that in 2015/16, local authorities spent £113m on support for UASC which is £48million over budget. ADCS estimated that the level of under-funding is in the region of £3.4m per 100 UASC per year (ADCS, 2016). This represents an unsustainable financial burden on local authorities which is affecting their ability to participate in the voluntary National Transfer Scheme now and in the future despite a desire to help.

Permanency

There were an estimated 4,000 children adopted, and 4,720 children made subjects of a Special Guardianship, Residence or Child Arrangement Order in England during 2017/18.

Whilst timescales for care proceedings have improved over recent phases of this research, respondents reported differences between the court's view and local authority plans for children, which sometimes meant less time was available to undertake robust assessments of prospective permanence

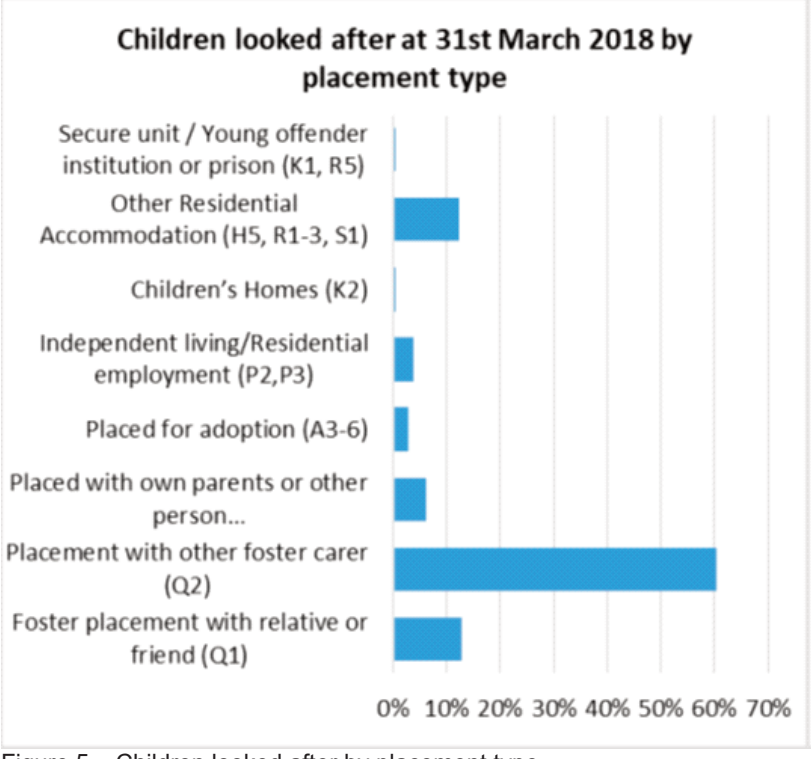

Figure 5 – Children looked after by placement type

carers, particularly special guardians.

Children ceasing to be looked after and care leavers

More children leave care to return home to live with parents than for any other reason (26%). However, the proportion of children who do so has reduced by a third since
2010/11. Fewer children are adopted (12.8%) but a greater proportion (15.1%) found permanence through Child Arrangement Orders (CAO) or Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).

An estimated 36,000 children are supported on either a CAO or SGO. The rate per 10,000 of the 0-17 population for children supported on either Order has increased by 81% between 2012/13 and 2017/18. Rates vary considerably between authorities and regions. For example, the North East supports the highest rate of SGOs (41) and the West Midlands the lowest (13) per 10,000 of the 0-17 population. There were an estimated 36,672 care leavers aged 18 to 21 at 31 March

2018.

Local authorities estimate there are a further 3,247 care leavers aged 22 to 25 (extrapolated to all England). However, the actual number of care leavers aged 22 to 25 to be supported under the new duties in the Children & Social Work Act 2017, is likely to be significantly higher, as these data relate to those that the authorities were supporting at 31 March 2018, prior to the new legislative provisions coming into effect. Whilst the principles of the Act are welcomed, the level of new burdens funding from government was insufficient.

Adolescents

115 respondents described the changing needs and demand on service provision in their local authority for adolescents, stating that children as young as 11-15 appear to be at risk of, or are experiencing abuse generally associated with an older age group. Better identification and understanding of risk factors have contributed to the continued, and in some cases escalating, concerns around adolescents. Young people are presenting with multiple and increasingly complex needs including challenging behaviour; emotional distress; mental ill-health, alcohol and substance misuse.

Adolescents coming to the attention of early help and social care services principally do so due to child criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, going missing from home or care, contextual safeguarding risks, online abuse and exploitation and homelessness. Of particular concern is the increase in the number of young people at risk of CSE. There were an estimated 21,685 children potentially at risk of CSE in 2017/18 equating to a rate of 18.3 per 10,000 of the 0-17 population compared to a rate of 15.7 in phase 5. Local authorities are developing specialist services to reduce risk and better meet the needs of vulnerable adolescents. The impact of the loss of youth services over the last ten years as a result of funding cuts to local government, was cited as a reason why local authorities are seeing increased demand for services.

Repeat activity

There was evidence from local authorities of reasons for increases or decreases in repeat activity (known as the 'revolving door') stemming from both child's need and systemic factors. Many authorities described a regime of routinely undertaking audits and analysis to understand trends, factors

and practice behind repeat activity (such as re-referrals, subject of repeat child protection plan, re-entering care, etc), and putting appropriate strategies in place, where possible.

Reasons for the revolving door of repeat activity were often as a result of neglect, domestic abuse and other trigger trio factors indicating that families with chronic difficulties are returning to the local authority repeatedly for help. Despite best efforts, tackling domestic abuse in a meaningful and sustainable way remains elusive. It is clear that much of the 'revolving door' repeat activity is a result of parental needs not being met. Adult disadvantage continues to impact upon children's outcomes and life chances.

Workforce

Sufficiency of experienced social work staff is one of the biggest challenges for local authorities, despite a great deal of positive activity to recruit, retain and provide professional development for new staff. DfE (DfE, 2018a) state that at 30th September 2017 social work vacancies had increased from 15% in September 2014 to 17% in September 2017, and agency staff rates have remained fairly stable at 16% nationally. These two snapshot figures mask a significant range between authorities from 1% to 50%, due to a range of influencing factors, including inspection outcomes.

Finance

Two years ago, the phase 5 report gave examples of the quantum of budget cuts reported by authorities, and a general view that financial pressures would get worse. There is a growing body of national research which clearly illustrates the pressures local authority children's services are facing (figure 2).

Local authorities are likely to overspend against the net planned expenditure of £8.03bn in 2018/19 for the totality of children's services excluding education (DfE, 2018b). The impact of transformation programmes takes time, leadership tenacity and investment to bear fruit. Whilst time-limited grants such as the DfE Innovation Programme (IP) funding and its Partners in Practice programme are valued, 54 authorities received no additional grant funding from the DfE in this period. There are concerns about the growing inequality of funding between authorities.

This short-termist approach to children's services

funding is unsustainable, and there is significant concern about what will happen when these time-limited pots of money cease. For example, 75% of respondents stated that their early help services would be cut or reduced, in some instances significantly, in 2020 when the Troubled Families programme and its funding are due to cease. The majority of local authorities have protected children's social care funding to date. Without that commitment and investment from local Elected Members and Council Leaders, which has sometimes been to the detriment of other council services, the financial crises for children's services would be even worse.

For 2018/19, local authorities have an estimated shortfall of an average of 10.4% in their children's services budget. Set against the 2018/19 published S251 budget of £8.03 billion, this would mean an additional £840 million each year before inflation is required simply to 'steady the ship'. This budget shortfall is current, very real, and is not going away as it is driven by demand-led services which local authorities must fund by law.

Top four current funding pressures (in order) are:

1. Placement costs for children looked after. For one authority, one placement for one young person cost £1million this year.
2. SEND and High Needs Block spending pressures, including transport. A small unitary authority was predicting an overspend of £1million on transport alone due to increases in the number of children eligible and unit costs.
3. High number of families who were 'tipping over' into the threshold for children's social care due to the impact of welfare reforms.
4. Continued spend on agency social work staffing due to lack of experienced social workers. One authority is spending £3.5milion on agency staff despite a 30% reduction in use.

Direction of travel – what next?

There is less optimism about the future than in phase 5. Of the 109 respondents, 64% predicted a general continued rise in safeguarding activity and numbers of children, young people and families needing the help of children's services. This compares to 40% two years ago, despite examples provided as part of the research of some innovative and enabling approaches within local areas and regions to manage demand and improve outcomes.

There is no evidence to suggest that levels of need will

reduce across safeguarding and looked after children's services across England. Authorities said that future demand would depend on the ability to stabilise and re-build early help, maintain strong leadership and system-wide approaches. We can predict from analysis of historical trends and population projections, new burdens and new duties and that the pressure on existing services will increase at a higher rate than previously experienced.

• Current and projected prevalence

The forecast calculations below are based purely on linear regression of historical data as the most basic and commonly used predictive analysis (i.e. a forecast based on trends).

• An increase in referrals to children's social care

Although numbers have fluctuated there could be 716,000 referrals by 2022/23, over 100,000 more than there were in 2007/8. However, greater changes in the number of referrals

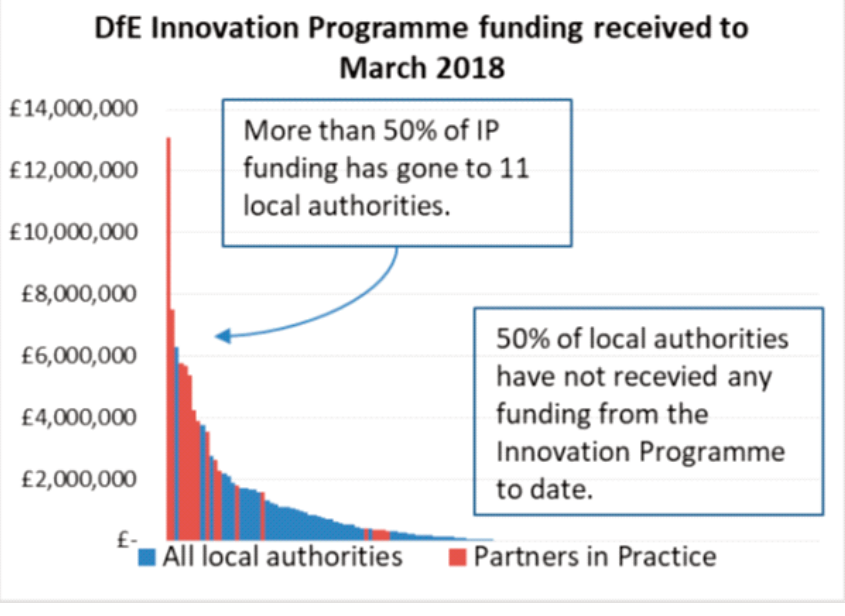

Figure 6 – DfE Innovation Programme funding

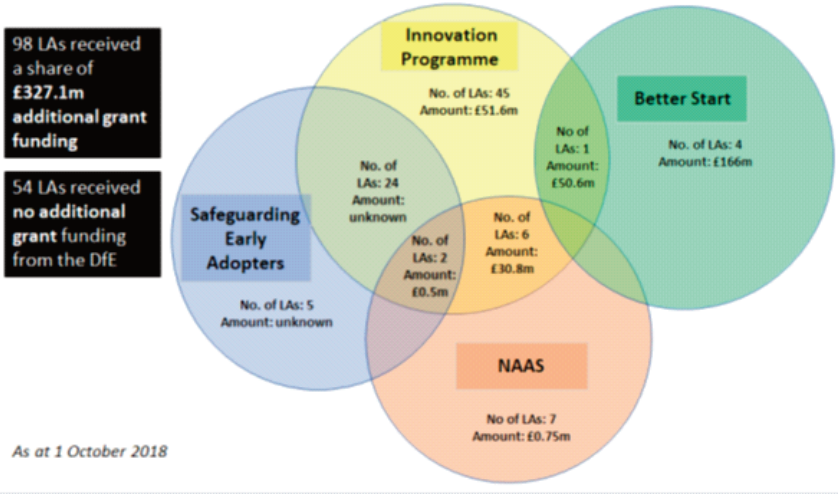

Figure 7 – Summary of four main grants and their recipients

between local authorities more recently makes forecasts less accurate.

• There will be more children in need

There could be over 750,000 children in need at any point in the year by 2022/23. Whilst there does appear to have been a stabilising of numbers of children in need over the past three years, the increase in population, diminishing ability to step down to early help because of cuts to services, and contributory factors above would appear to suggest that this 'levelling' over the past three years is unlikely to continue. Given the increase in the number of children within this CiN cohort (which includes child protection and looked after), we could assume that those children in this cohort who are receiving services under Section 17 only may reduce.

• We will have more children who are subjects of Section 47 enquiries

The increase in the number of Section 47 enquiries is the most dramatic change in historical and projected further increase. It is also the most accurate forecast (R2). A forecast of over 250,000 in 2022/23 – over 180,000 more Section 47s being completed based on this trajectory of consistent year-on-year increases.

• We will have more children subjects of a child protection plan

The predicted increase in the number of children who are the subjects of a child protection plan at the 31 March each year is forecast to be 56% from 2008/09 levels. There could be over 66,000 children who are subjects of child protection plans by 31 March 2023.

• We will have more children looked after

There could be 81,000 children looked after at 31 March 2023 – 20,000 more than there were at the beginning of Safeguarding Pressures research in 2007. These basic forecasts, based purely on historical trends, confirm a national picture of more children in the system without factoring in the demand variables described above. These forecasts also assume no change (for better or for worse) in the wider societal determinants of family distress. However, the complexity and differential influence of these factors between local authorities cannot be under-estimated. For example, the Institute of Fiscal Studies (Hood and Waters, 2017) estimates that the total number of children living in poverty will increase to five million by 2020/21, but the impact will be to differing extents in different local authorities.

Conclusion

The evidence within this report provides a compelling picture of historical, current and projected demand pressures based not only from a local authority children's service perspective, but triangulated and summarised with a significant amount of other published research and evidence.

We conclude, in line with much other research and evidence, that the increase across all aspects of children's social care, despite early help services, arise from:

• Wider societal determinants linked to poverty.
• New and greater risks to children and young people such as County Lines and other contextual safeguarding risks.
• An increased number of UASC.
• More care leavers as a result of the increase in the number of children looked after and extended care leaver duties to age 25.
• A growth in the overall child population.
• Additional new duties from legislation and policy.

These wider societal determinants, such as poverty driven by the cumulative impacts of welfare reform, in secure work, and lack of affordable housing, lead to an increased risk of strained, poor-quality family relationship, which in turn increases the risk of poor quality parenting, parental mental ill-health and emotional distress. The cumulative impact of these factors affect children's wellbeing, which in turn affect their outcomes and life chances. If these factors are not addressed, and taking into account the projected continued growth in population, then we can expect the number of children and families who require support to continue to grow, unabated.

The ripple effect of pressures in one part of the system, e.g. the pressures experienced by universal services, such as schools or health services, in turn impact on the lives of children to such an extent that they require more intensive levels of support. Whilst attention is paid nationally to some of these issues, including mental health, national legislation and policy continue to focus in an atomised way on tackling single issues and risks affecting children and families. This disjointed approach at a national level does little to alleviate the risks and disadvantages that children and their families face.

Critical issues which authorities are tackling in their efforts to meet these needs include: difficulty in recruitment and retention of experienced social workers; insufficiency and the cost of placements for children looked after; meeting duties and additional demand from SEND reforms; and, unprecedented funding pressures.

Some authorities, particularly those which have received additional funding from DfE Innovation Programme, have achieved system change and many are implementing innovative and more cost-effective ways to deliver services, which is welcome, but takes time and is not achievable everywhere.

Local authorities have protected and invested in children's services despite devastating cuts to their budgets using reserves or diverting funds from other services, yet we hear that worse impacts may yet be to come. This situation is simply not tenable with many respondents and other sources stating that services can no longer be protected going forward. The tipping point has been reached.

In terms of the future, there is a sense that authorities have been constantly redesigning and re-configuring services to meet needs and manage the growth in demand. They have

done so whilst maintaining, passionately, a clear focus on children and their families at the heart of services. In order to stop the cycle, we are seeing, and start to reduce demand and support children and families when they need it most, local authority children's services must be resourced to allow for a focus on prevention. Change of this magnitude takes time, more time than a parliamentary cycle. This is a challenge that the government cannot ignore as we enter the next Spending Review period.

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This article is a summary of the report *Safeguarding Pressures Phase 6*, published on 6 November 2018 by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and produced by Carole Brooks Associates and ADCS. The text is the executive summary, although four of the graphics were excluded as they did not fit with the format of *Education Journal Review*. The full report is available from the ADCS website at http://adcs.org.uk/safeguarding/article/safeguarding-pressures

Short-form articles

These shorter research articles first appeared in *Education Journal* earlier this year.

The first is an article by Professor Margaret Clark, on the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016. It first appeared in *Education Journal* on 11 March 2018. Professor Clark also wrote the article on *What determines literacy policies, evidence or ideology? The power of politicians over policy and practice,* in the first part of this issue.

The second is an article by Professor Ewart Keep on *Marketisation in English further education – the challenges for management and leadership.* This first appeared in *Education Journal* on 24 September 2018.

The progress in international reading literacy study PIRLS 2016: a cautionary tale

By Margaret M Clark OBE

Margaret M Clark OBE

Margaret M Clark was awarded a DLitt for her early published research on reading and an OBE for her services to early years education. She has been elected to the Reading Hall of Fame, an independent organisation that recognises lifetime achievement in the field of reading. She was Professor and Head of the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Birmingham and is now a Visiting Professor at Newman University.

The first PIRLS study involving 35 countries took place in 2001. The results generated headlines in England such as 'English primary pupils are among the best readers in the world' (DfES). In 2003 I published an article critiquing the results, with the subtitle a 'cautionary tale'; such cautions are relevant to any international study (see chapter 19 in Clark, 2016).

In December 2017, the PIRLS 2016 report was published on standards of reading comprehension of ten-year-olds in 50 countries, one of which was England (Scotland and Wales did not take part in this cycle). By 5 December the Standards Minister for England, Nick Gibb had made a speech at the British Library, the transcript of which is downloadable from DfE (https://www/gov.uk). In that speech, and subsequent speeches, the latest in Fiji to the Commonwealth Education Ministers, he claimed that this international evidence 'confirms that our approach is working' as the international study of 9-year-olds' reading ability showed that 'England has risen from joint 10th place in 2011 to joint 8th place in 2016' and that the low performing pupils are gaining most rapidly. The speech is full of unsubstantiated claims including a belief that by the time of the first check in 2012 synthetic phonics had indeed been adopted as the method of teaching reading in England. The evidence base for these claims is examined by seven literacy researchers in Reading the Evidence: Synthetic phonics and literacy learning (Clark, 2017) and by further twelve in Teaching Initial Literacy: Policies, evidence and ideology (Clark, 2018), where Part II is devoted to an analysis of the

PIRLS results. The literacy policies of Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland are very different from England and both ranked statistically higher than England. It is therefore surprising that in a government claiming to have an evidence-based policy no consideration has yet been given as to what we might learn from these results and policies (see chapters 6 and 7 in Clark, 2018).

PIRLS 2016

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international comparative study to assess and compare the reading performance of pupils in their fourth year of formal schooling across participating countries when around ten years of age. England has taken part in all four PIRLS cycles every five years since 2001. A total of 50 countries took part in PIRLS in 2016. Three aspects were assessed 1) reading comprehension 2) a student questionnaire and 3) a questionnaire to head teachers and teachers. A questionnaire was also distributed to a parent/guardian who was asked to provide information about their child and their home environment related to reading activities. England and the United States were the only two countries that did not administer these questionnaires. It means that for England we have only the views of the head teachers, teachers and pupils who sat the test as to the home circumstances, with no possibility of comparing their views with that of the parents themselves.

In answer to an enquiry as to why the United States did not administer the parent questionnaire we immediately had a response indicating that: “NCES found that parents tend to feel as though the questions may be a bit too intrusive or time consuming, consequently, we do not administer the parent questionnaire in many studies.”

I sent a Freedom of Information Question to the Department for Education

“On page 19 of the recently published PIRLS 2016 Report for England it is stated that England and The United States are the only two countries (out of 50) not to administer the questionnaire to parent/guardians. No indication is given as why this decision was made or by whom. Why was this decision made and by whom?”

The decision that England should not administer the

PIRLS 2016 home questionnaire was taken in September 2014 by DfE ministers. Much of the information asked for in the PIRLS home questionnaire is collected by the department in other ways for example, pupils` earlier performance at school, and their-socio-economic background. A further consideration was the additional burden this would put on the parents. Previous experience of international questionnaires to parents demonstrate that they tend to elicit very low response rates, which, in turn, makes the data unusable.

Initiated in 2016 was a computer-based reading assessment of students` ability to acquire and use information when reading online. Fourteen countries took part in ePIRLS, including Ireland. From this there was both interesting information on the pupils` ability and their attitude towards online reading. I also enquired why England did not participate in this assessment.

The decision that England should not administer ePIRLS was taken by DfE ministers in June 2013. The ePIRLS assessment would take around 1.5 hour in addition to the 2.5 hours of the paper-based assessment, and it was recommended by the study organisers that ePIRLS be administered on a consecutive day to PIRLS. The need to release year 5 pupils for two consecutive half days would make it extremely difficult to engage schools. We already participate in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which moved to a computer-based mode of delivery in 2015. This has provided insights into on-screen skills for reading (and also for mathematics, science and collaborative problem solving) albeit at age 15, rather than primary age pupils.

Some of the information for this article is taken from the National Report for England (McGrane, Stiff et al., 2017). However, there is an international report and reports for individual countries, all of which can be downloaded. I consulted these, and the reports for Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland, as both ranked statistically higher than England and both gave the parental questionnaires. As England did not administer the parent questionnaire this aspect is not discussed in the report on England.

In 2016 England's sample was around 5000 Year 5 pupils from 170 primary schools. The average age of pupils participating in PIRLS 2016 was 10.2 (in England 10.3).

England's average score in PIRLS in 2016 is 559, significantly higher than in 2006 and 2011. However, it is significantly lower than The Republic of Ireland (567) and Northern Ireland (565). In chapter 5 of Clark 2018 I discuss the findings and how much we can legitimately conclude from the report on any causal connection between government policy and the improved results. PIRLS 2016 is the first opportunity to assess how performance in the phonics check introduced in 2012 and taken at the end of Year 1 relates to performance in PIRLS; thus, this aspect has prominence in the report for England. However, warnings are expressed in the report:

"Drawing unqualified conclusions about the causal effects of policy is impossible on the basis of PIRLS data alone. …Some policies will not have been in place for long enough to have an effect upon Year 5 pupils 'literacy levels in 2016'…".

the current results should be somewhat cautiously interpreted given that other countries have also adopted phonics approaches over varying lengths of time and the results have been mixed in terms of average PIRLS performance (McGrane, Stiff et al.: 146) and 'there is no sustained evidence that countries with phonics programmes have higher average PIRLS performance in general' (page 149).

It will be no surprise that the pupils who met the standard on the phonics check (a mark of at least 32 out of 40) had an average score much higher than other pupils. However, the range of individual PIRLS scores at each raw mark on the phonics check is quite wide (McGrane, Stiff et al. 2017 figure 4.6: 65).

Further findings

As noted by the minister 'a higher proportion of pupils in England were categorised as being `very confident` readers (53%)'. However, they were reported as being slightly less engaged in their reading lessons as compared with pupils internationally and the percentage of pupils reporting they like reading is lower than the international median. The number of books that pupils in England reported they have at home is strongly related to reading confidence and enjoyment as well as average performance on PIRLS. We have no confirmation from the parents in England of the accuracy of these

estimates.

Career satisfaction of primary school teachers

Thirty-five percent of the pupils in England who sat PIRLS in 2016 had current teachers with less than 5 years teaching experience (Northern Ireland 11% and The Republic 17%). As many had recently trained it is not surprising that in England the percentage of pupils in England with teachers who in the last two years had dedicated time for reading-related professional development is substantially lower than in the comparator countries. NB These are not the early years teachers involved in the phonics check, but the pupils` current teachers. Career satisfaction in NI (62%) and The Republic (60%) was higher than in England (51%). Career satisfaction in the Republic of Ireland in PIRLS 2011 and 2016 has been higher that in many other countries and associated with high scores.

It is interesting to note that in The National Report on England by McGrane et al., 2017, page 127 is devoted to 'career satisfaction of primary school teachers in the Republic of Ireland', with references from other research to back the statements. Recruitment and retention of teachers in some countries, including England, has become a growing problem. Indeed, concern has been expressed very recently in England by the Secretary of State for Education. However, his focus has been on reducing the workload. That may only be part of the problem. Excessive testing of young children for accountability, and dictation by central government not only of policy in general but how to teach, has removed the professional autonomy not only of teachers but also of head teachers. Even the content of continuing professional development is dictated within narrow policy confines. These constraints in England may well be discouraging young people from entering the profession and causing others to leave; the extent to which this is true is worth investigating. In contrast, in The Republic of Ireland teacher training courses remain highly competitive and trainee teachers are typically academically high achievers, whereas it is claimed that in the United Kingdom they are those with sufficient qualifications, 'but rarely the highest achievers'. Teaching is perceived as a highly valued and respected career in the Republic of Ireland, it is stated, which has not been the case elsewhere. It would seem

worth investigating in what ways the literacy policy itself, the way it was developed and the autonomy granted to teachers have contributed to the Republic of Ireland's high ranking in international studies, to the high regard for the profession and the career satisfaction of the teachers.

The influence of home background on PIRLS results

Raising the percentage pass on the check year on year had not yet come to dominate practice in the early years in England at the time the pupils who were assessed on PIRLS sat the check in 2012. It is yet to be seen whether the full implementation of this policy does indeed improve the level of reading comprehension of pupils in England, their confidence in reading and desire to read. There are important findings from PIRLS on the influence of early preschool literacy experiences on attainment. We need to look beyond the results for England to examine this aspect.

England had a large proportion of pupils' headteachers who believe that parental expectations for pupil achievement are 'low or very low' (14%) much higher than the international median of 3%. However, the pupils` teachers were less likely than headteachers to report that parental expectations or support for pupil achievement are low or very low. As noted above we do not for England have any corroboration of this from parents.

According to the international report 'good readers had an early start in literacy learning'. The information from the parents revealed two ways that pupils get an early start in literacy namely:

Having parents who often engage them in early literacy activities and

attending pre-primary education.

Parents are the students' first teachers and 39 per cent of the students had parents who reported often engaging their children in early literacy activities such as reading, talking or singing to them as well as telling them stories and teaching them to write alphabet letters. These students had higher attainment. This is downloaded from

http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2016/international-results/pirls/summary

It is claimed that students whose parents reported that their children could perform early literacy tasks when beginning primary school 'illustrate that early preparation at home appears to have an effect on attainment in fourth grade'. In the report for Northern Ireland it is reported that parents' enjoyment of reading was also associated with higher attainment. In Northern Ireland 49 per cent of the parents who responded to the questionnaire reported that they 'Very much like reading', a percentage greater than in any comparator country; their children had higher average attainment in reading. In England in the absence of such data the influence of the home, even preschool, on literacy achievement may be under estimated and that of school literacy policy over emphasised. It is possible that in England the parents contributed both to the pupils` high score on the phonics check and on PIRLS.

Literacy online

In the fourteen countries which participated in ePIRLS it is reported that good readers had little difficulty reading online, that a high degree of achievement was demonstrated, that they were able to navigate to the appropriate webpages, completing the assessment in the allotted time. Irish pupils performed as well on the digital ePIRLS assessment as they did on the paper-based PIRLS assessment.

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Marketisation in English further education – the challenges for management and leadership

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By Ewart Keep

Although English policy makers and commentators often slip back into the habit of talking about a further education (FE) 'system', they are mistaken. There is no longer a system – for that one would need to travel to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Since FE colleges were awarded freedom from local authority control in 1992 (the process known as incorporation), English institutions have been incentivised by successive governments and national funding regimes to compete for students, and from 2010 onwards ministers have been keen to see much greater and more overt marketisation of provision as a means to drive up efficiency and effectiveness.

As a result, what England now possesses is a set of interlinked quasi-markets for public and apprenticeship levy funding. These quasi-markets include 14-16 education, 16-19, levy funded apprenticeship, non-levy funded apprenticeship, un-devolved elements of the Adult Education Budget (AEB), and post-19 loans funded learning. Each has its own rules, and the tendering and commissioning systems are operated by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), except for levy-funded apprenticeship, where individual employers decided which providers to do business with. These processes are complex, subject to

frequent change and can produce highly unpredictable results, even for providers with a well-established track record (witness the unexpected losers in the last rounds of ESFA's AEB and non-levy apprenticeship tendering process, where some large, well-established and well-regarded providers lost almost their entire funding allocations). Moreover, they operate at different spatial levels (local, regional and national) depending on the type and level of course being studied.

For the senior management teams (SMTs) in English FE colleges and independent training providers (ITPs) probably the largest single current challenge is to craft and deliver strategies that will enable them to successfully navigate their way around and compete in these marketplaces. This challenge is being compounded by other parallel changes and reforms, such as the development of T-levels, new performance management systems and key performance indicators being imposed by government, GCSE English and Maths re-sits policies, the impact of a raft of different changes to the content and funding of apprenticeships, and ongoing reductions in real terms in funding. On this last point, the Department for Education (DfE) has become sufficiently concerned to have instigated an investigation into the long-term financial sustainability of FE colleges.

In fashioning a coherent response to these developments, SMTs in FE are confronting several tensions and problems, only some of which can be discussed here. The first is that in marked contradistinction to schools, HE and apprenticeships, the government appears to have no coherent overall vision for how FE provision and institutions should develop in the coming years. There is no overall public statement of strategic intent available from what is FE's prime stakeholder- DfE - a situation that makes it much harder for institutions to identify and establish what their priorities should be. This is important because one of the fundamental problems with FE's current remit or mission is its potentially multi-role, multi-customer spectrum of provision. This ranges from high level vocational learning in the shape of degree and sub-degree education (currently the subject of a policy steer that indicates a desire by government to see a major expansion of sub-

degree courses) to a provider-of-last-resort role for post-16 students that schools and their VI forms do not want to cater for, and second chance work with low-skilled adult learners (e.g. ESOL, adult basic skills and community learning). With overall funding constraints and growing competition from other providers for higher end, higher status provision, hard choices loom.

The second problem is that it is not always clear who the customer or consumer really is within the various FE marketplaces (see below). In some instances, such as mainstream 16-19 provision, it is the student as funding follows their choice of course and institution. For levy-funded apprenticeship, the prime customer is now the employer because they wield direct power of choice over who provides the training. For other areas, such as AEB allocations and non-levy apprenticeship, the ESFA and the government are acting as the commissioner of provision via a tendering process, and for loans-funded post-19 funding is allocated in blocks to providers who then must go out and sell courses to students to unlock the money.

Market regulation for FE providers is another source of uncertainty and risk. The current arrangements are messy and complex. Regulatory duties are split between a variety of bodies – the Office for Students (OfS) which covers for HE in FE, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for HE courses, the ESFA, Ofsted, the FE Commissioner, and the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA). Talking to officials in government and the above listed agencies, it is apparent that some are quite concerned about a lack of clarity in this regulatory landscape, about how these mechanisms mesh or conflict with each other and with traditional forms of governance and accountability, and whether in some market segments the regulatory barriers to market entry have been set too low. For example, the number of approved apprenticeship providers and those with an AEB allocation that were registered as liable for inspection by Ofsted rose from 1,043 in 2011/12 to 2,543 in April 2018 and there has been debate about whether Ofsted has sufficient resources to cope with this influx.

The regulatory set-up also operates in a way that creates extremely high stakes for those being regulated.

An unsatisfactory Ofsted inspection can lead to loss of business, changes in the SMT, interventions by the FE Commissioner, or in the case of independent training providers (ITPs) outright closure. Compared to some other forms of government-imposed regulation, for example of the privatised utilities, this appears a much tougher regime.

At the same time, the traditional model of a college accountable to its local community may be losing contact with contemporary reality. Real accountability is now primarily focused upwards to the DfE and its agencies and regulatory bodies. The rhetoric of markets claims that accountability is to customers and that choice will drive provider behaviour to respond to demand. Moreover, as new hybrid forms of college that sponsor their own schools or university technical colleges (UTCs) emerge, and as chains of colleges that are not always focused on a single geographical location or region grow (for example the Newcastle College Group, which overseas colleges in Kidderminster and London as well as Newcastle), the old ideal of accountability to a well-defined local community comes under increasing strain.

Another issue for college SMTs is that while the government generally favours market forces and customer relationships as a driver for efficiency and relevance, it simultaneously also believes in the doctrine of New Public Management (NPM). This espouses a model whereby in many circumstances the 'minister knows best' and the state and political judgement can and should second guess, direct or over-ride consumer and provider choices when it suits them. One example of this tendency would be the three million apprenticeships starts by 2020 target. In a genuine market, the level of new apprenticeship places would be left to the individual decisions by young people and employers. Another example would be ministerial edicts about GCSE maths and English re-sits. If student choice was genuinely driving and shaping provision, then it seems safe to say that the vast bulk of re-sits would vanish instantaneously. Colleges are thus left in the uncomfortable position of seeking to meet government objectives that are not always shared by their

customers.

Some civil servants and agency officials also believe that it is ultimately possible to arrive at an incentive structure that enables a balance between provider competition and cooperation at local levels, although they struggle to specify what this balance and the forces which could create it would look like in any detail. The hope is that it will magically 'emerge' and that providers in a given locality will choose to specialise in ways that deliver a full pattern of provision across subjects and levels. If this does not materialise, the danger is that policy makers will blame colleges rather than the incentive system that they have crafted.

Another looming threat is that some elements of the FE marketplace (broadly defined) is potentially threatened by a pincer movement from schools and higher education institutions (HEIs). In a world where cash follows choice by parent or student, attracting 'bums on seats' now matter massively to institutional survival. The first side of the pincer is schools. At any given moment there are a finite number of potential post-16 students in a locality, and in the 16-19 market colleges are now competing with school VI forms (of which 260 new ones were created between 2011/12 and 2014/15), UTCs, free schools, studio schools and apprenticeship providers. As many UTCs and studio schools have already discovered to their cost, this is a brutally competitive marketplace where failure to recruit in sufficient volume leads to institutional demise.

The other side of the pincer is HE. It is now apparent that the expansion of some Russell Group universities and a demographic dip in the overall size of the cohort of 18-year-olds is placing many low tariff HEIs under massive pressure to find new students. In 2017 London Met accepted 33 per cent fewer students than in 2012, the University of East London and Southampton Solent were both down by 27 per cent over the same period, the University of Cumbria was down 24 per cent, Kingston 23 per cent, and Huddersfield and Sunderland both by 15 per cent. Since the big increase in tuition fees a few years ago, English HEIs have collectively borrowed about £28 billion from commercial lenders and the money markets to fund new halls of residence, bars,

library facilities, ICT infrastructure, and social and sporting facilities. Interest payments need to be maintained, which means cash flow needs to be maintained, which in turn means student fee income needs to be maintained. Ergo, desperate HEIs are looking to move into new areas, some of which have hitherto been largely the preserve of FE colleges, for example HNDs and HNCs, and access courses. Moreover, where HEIs validate FE colleges degree provision there have been moves to remove validation in subjects where the HEI is now hoping to deliver degree level apprenticeships, and there are already a few HEIs that have started to extend their provision down into Level 3 provision in specialist areas. These developments may be a harbinger of wider future trends.

With devolution of the post-19 Adult Education Budget (AEB) to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) we also must factor in the emergence of entirely different models of commissioning and governance at different geographical levels. Whereas national government is strongly enamoured of markets and competition, most localities have, to date, espoused a desire to use their AEB allocation to create local systems of provision. Some MCAs are also starting to link skills with other aspects of policy, such as fair work, the real living wage, job quality, in-work progression, skill usage, workplace innovation, inclusive growth, local industrial strategies and business support and improvement services. In other words, their strategic approaches are starting to resemble those already in place and evolving in Scotland and Wales. The UK government, by way of contrast, continues to see some of the above mentioned areas as not being legitimate foci for policy interventions (e.g. job quality and fair work), and to deal with the remainder in isolated policy silos rather than as part of a more joined-up strategy. Colleges in the MCAs will thus face having two sets of political masters for different segments of their funding portfolios in conditions where the two masters may have widely divergent concepts of what policy is there to deliver and, as a consequence, what good performance by colleges looks like.

The final set of pressures is generated by the problematic relationship that education and training

providers continue to have with employers. The English government has, to some extent, increasingly come to see employers as the primary customer in the educational landscape, and a belief has developed that if only providers can deliver what employers want (however these desiderata might be defined) then something magical will occur in terms of national productivity trends and levels of international economic competitiveness.

This is a deeply flawed proposition, predicated on a belief that there is a simple, linear relationship between national stocks of human capital (usually proxied by qualifications at various levels) and economic performance. Based on this, successive UK governments of every political persuasion have invested in education and training, and have reformed every aspect of education and training –curriculum, qualifications, programmes, funding regimes, inspection and quality assurance systems, and target-setting mechanisms. The fruits of these massive waves of reform have been that whereas in 1979, 11 per cent of the workforce had a degree or sub-degree qualification, and 45 per cent had no qualifications at all; now about 42 per cent of the workforce possesses a degree or sub-degree qualification, and just 8 per cent have no qualifications. We have experienced a skills revolution, albeit one that has received sometimes muted official recognition.

The fundamental problem that surrounds these figures is that the economic impact of the revolution has been far smaller than anticipated. The trend in UK labour productivity (output per hour) growth remained constant between 1975 and 2008, despite a massive injection of human capital, and thereafter, in the wake of the great financial crash, it flat-lined. The skills revolution has hence thus far proved insufficient to generate a productivity miracle. It is profoundly uncertain if delivering more of the same will now generate different or better results.

Moreover, designating employers as customers within education and training provision is problematic within a national policy context that has consistently failed to define their rights, roles and responsibilities (the 3 Rs) in relation to national education and skills

policy objectives. Employers have often assumed the role of detached and sometimes grumpy consumers, rather than that of co-producers and partners. Without an element of co-production and what the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL) termed a two-way street between workplace and classroom, firm and skills provider, it is for example hard to see how the work placement element of T levels or the on-the-job learning component in apprenticeships can be delivered in the ways that policy intends.

It is also the case that designating employers as the primary customer leaves colleges and other providers in the awkward position of trying to mediate between sometimes divergent demands from different 'customers', in the shape of government targets, employers' professed skill 'need' and students' demand for and choice of courses and qualifications. All this has to be done within a pre-existing pattern of course provision and institutional capacity that are in part dictated by staffing and resource constraints. This is not going to be an easy set of trade-offs to manage, given that colleges often have little or no direct influence over these three customers groupings, and given that the government continues to aspire to skills supply much more closely 'matching' demand than has hitherto proved possible. It could be argued that on this aspect of policy, colleges are being set up to fail, as both past experience and evidence from other countries suggests that matching is very hard to contrive and sustain.

How college SMTs react to these multiple challenges current varies widely. This is hardly surprising as institutions start in very different places in terms of the state of their finances, patterns of student and employer demand in their local labour markets, the degrees of social deprivation in their catchment area, the type and mix of students and courses, their size, the quality of their estates and equipment, local histories and patterns of cooperation and competition, the range and quality of their relationships with stakeholders, and their managerial and leadership capacities. Some see markets as an opportunity, have become 'wheeler dealers', and proved adept at spotting opportunities and navigating the shifting shoals of funding competitions

and tendering rounds. For them, any attempt to impose or encourage greater cooperation may be perceived as a threat. Others, by contrast, hanker after a return to a more systems-based approach and a world where there is greater cooperation and less cut-throat competition – between colleges, and between colleges and other types of provider.

Beyond these differences lies a wider set of issues. Current national policy seems to want FE to be an agile responder to market signals and forces rather than a shaper of its own destiny. Strategy, insofar as there is any, is meant to be developed and delivered by government. This apportioning of an essentially customer-responsive, but otherwise passive or subordinate role to colleges is problematic because it helps obfuscate a set of choices that will ultimately need to be addressed. Many of these can only be resolved through debate at national level and via partnership between DfE, CMAs, employers and FE and other providers. They include the balance to be struck at local, regional and national levels between competition and partnership, and the incentive structures needed to bring this about; the balance between national targets and priorities delivered via market choice, versus local priorities delivered through local systems; and the balance of priorities between higher level, higher status forms of vocational and technical learning and social inclusion and second chance provision. Unless and until all the interested parties are involved in debating and resolving these issues, college leaderships will be left in the unenviable position of lacking a clear direction to take.

This article draws research conducted by the author and the Association of Colleges (AoC), which was funded by the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) and is reported on in much greater detail in a recent FETL monograph entitled *Scripting the Future,* which can be downloaded from the FETL website.

Select Committee Reports

The following reports are reviewed in this section:

Retaining and Developing the Teaching Workforce, Public Accounts Committee, 17th report of Session 2017/19, HC 460. Published on 31 January 2018.

Student Loans, Treasury Select Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19. HC 478. Published on 18 February 2018.

The Monitoring, Inspection and Funding of Learndirect Ltd, Public Accounts Committee, 22nd Report of the Session 2017-19, HC 646. Published on 2 March 2018.

The Future of the Social Mobility Commission, Education Select Committee, Second Report of Session 2017–19. HC 866. Published on 20 March 2018.

Brexit, Science and Innovation, Science and Technology Select Committee (Commons), second report of the Session 2017/19. HC 705. Published on Wednesday 21 March 2018.

Academy Schools' Finances, Public Accounts Committee, 30th report of Session 2017/19, HC 760. Published on 30 March 2018.

The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation, First Joint Report of the Education and Health and Social Care Committees of Session 2017–19, HC 642. Published on 9 May 2018.

Government Response to the Education Select Committee Report into the Future of the Social Mobility Commission, Department of Education, Cm 9619, 23 May 2018.

The Higher Education Market, Public Accounts Committee, 45th report of Session 2017/19, HC 693. Published on Friday 15 June 2018.

The Teaching Workforce

Retaining and Developing the Teaching Workforce, Public Accounts Committee, 17th report of Session 2017/19, HC 460. Published on 31 January 2018. Downloadable free from https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/460/460.pdf

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has warned a variety of factors had contributed to the growing sense of crisis for schools in England that were struggling to retain and develop the teaching workforce. The PAC's report, Retaining and Developing the Teaching Workforce, pointed out that it was particularly worrying that the number of secondary school teachers had been falling since 2010 and more teachers had been leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement since 2012.

While many teachers had cited heavy workload as a reason for their departure, pupil numbers were rising and the Department for Education expected schools to make significant savings from using their staff more efficiently.

The PAC report argued that the Department should have been able to foresee the situation and take action to address it. It added that by its own admission, the Department had given insufficient priority to teacher retention and development and it had got the balance wrong between training new teachers and supporting the existing workforce, which had led to spending on the former being 15 times greater than on the latter. The report concluded that the Department had a disparate collection of small-scale interventions but they were not enough to address the underlying issues. While the quality of teaching and the level of teaching vacancies varied significantly across the country, the report stressed that the Department did not seem to understand the reasons for the variation or the different challenges that schools in different regions faced.

The PAC concluded that "the failure of the Department to get to grips with the number of teachers leaving puts additional pressure on schools faced with rising numbers of children needing a school place and the teachers to teach them.

The Chairman of the Public Account Committee, Meg Hillier MP, said that a crisis had been brewing in English classrooms but Government action to address it had been “sluggish and incoherent”. She argued that it should have been obvious to senior civil servants that growing demand for school places, combined with a drive for schools to make efficiency savings, would only build pressure in the system. Ms Hillier called on the Government to “get a grip” on teacher retention and set out a targeted, measurable plan to support struggling schools as a matter of urgency.

She said that there were other troubling trends, and in 2015/16 school leaders had filled only half of their vacancies with sufficiently qualified and experienced teachers. Ms Hillier added that there were significant regional variations in vacancy levels and the quality of teaching and not enough good quality, continuing professional development was available. She warned that without meaningful intervention from Government, there was a danger that the challenges would become “an intractable threat to children’s education."

Student Loans

Student Loans, House of Commons Treasury Select Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. HC 478. Published on 18 February 2018, by the House of Commons.

The House of Commons Treasury Select Committee pointed out that the student loan system was likely to remain high on the political agenda for the foreseeable future, not least due to the Prime Minister's announcement that the Government would be undertaking a major review of university funding and student financing.

The Committee examined various aspects of the student loan system, including the impact of the system on public finances, the marketisation of higher education, and issues faced by students. However, the inquiry did not consider the optimal level of higher education funding. For its final evidence session as part of the inquiry, the Committee took to Twitter, to ask those with experience of the student loan system to submit questions for the Committee to ask on their behalf.

Public finances and the design of the system

Due to the National Accounts accounting rules, there is no impact on the deficit when student loans are issued. Therefore, moving the vast majority of all higher education spending into loans that would be written off in 30 years has moved nearly all higher education spending out of the deficit. Current policy decisions will have no impact on the public finances for the next 30 years. Based on the current RAB charge, £6–7 billion of annual write-offs were missing from the deficit, which was approximately equivalent to excluding the entire NHS capital budget from the deficit.

The policy of selling off student loans prior to their write-off allows the Government to spend billions of pounds of public money without any negative impact on its deficit target at all, which creates a huge incentive for the Government to finance higher education through loans that can be sold off. The Government concluded its first sale of income contingent student loans in December 2017, when it sold £3.5 billion of loans, writing off £1.8 billion (51 per cent) of those loans in the process. The Government plans to sell off £12 billion of loans

over the next five years. If the rate of losses on these sales is maintained, billions of pounds of student loan losses will be crystallised without having any impact on the deficit. Its inclusion would increase the deficit as forecast by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) by 13 per cent, from £45.5 billion to £51 billion.

Political control over increasing Government expenditure is exerted through analysis of Public Sector Net Borrowing (the deficit) which the Government sets as its fiscal target. The OBR assesses whether the Government will meet this target and subsequently the majority of political debate on public spending is focused on it. But as the writing off of student loans will have no impact on the deficit for the next 30 years, the large and increasing level of money spent on higher education will make no difference to whether the Government meets its target. The Committee warned that there was no effective control over the increasing fiscal cost of the student loan regime. It suggested that better oversight could be achieved through linking the Government's fiscal borrowing target to the Public-Sector Net Cash Requirement, which would show how much money the Government would actually need to borrow.

While the Government is not responsible for the international accounting rules that allow the fiscal illusions within student loans to exist, the National Accounts accounting rules regarding financial transactions were not intended to be used for loans that had been designed to not be paid back in full. The Committee pointed out that loans that were intended to be written off were a partially repayable grant rather than a loan. It called on the ONS to re-examine its classification of student loans as financial assets, which they were in legal form, and consider whether a portion of the loan should be classed as a grant. The Committee stressed that the Resource Accounting and Budgeting charge was one of the most important numbers in the student loan debate as it presented in a single figure, how much student debt the Government expected it would have to write off. Despite that, the 2016–17 Department for Education Annual report and accounts had not specified the RAB charge. The Committee recommended that it should be published prominently in the Department for Education's Annual report and accounts, and that it should be publicly updated alongside any changes to the student loan repayment framework.

The Government is better able to manage an exposure

to macroeconomic risks, such as low overall wage growth and low rates of employment, than the private sector. As a result, private sector investors require a large risk margin when taking on student loan assets from Government. The risk margin on the first student loans sale was, in aggregate, 51 per cent of the sale price.

The Committee argued that exchanging student loans for cash would not improve the Government's financial position, as it merely exchanged one asset for another. While the sale did reduce Public Sector Net Debt, such a fiscal illusion had done little to improve the Government's financial position and it may cost the taxpayer money. Given the high-risk margin, the Committee suggested that the Government may be better off keeping student loans on its own balance sheet, rather than shifting the risks to the private sector and paying a large premium for doing so.

Whether the sale of student loans passes the Treasury's value for money test was heavily dependent on the discount rate used to calculate the future value of student loan repayments, and as with all discount rates, there was a large margin for error. The Government has chosen a different discount rate for the purposes of the sale, which placed a lower value on the future repayments of the loans, than that which was used in the Department for Education Accounts. The Committee recommended that, as part of its major review, the Government should consider using the same discount rate as that used in the Department for Education Accounts, as audited by the National Audit Office.

The Committee pointed out that writing off a significant proportion of student loan debt was a deliberate design feature of the student loan system, which made a student loan unlike any other form of loan or debt. In the absence of an effective explanation of the student loan framework, including the terms and conditions students were accepting, it was inevitable that the public would see write-offs as emblematic of a failing system. The Committee concluded that the criticism of retrospective changes which had increased the burden on graduates as "unfair", levelled by MoneySavingExpert and the National Union of Students, had been justified, and it called on the Government to cease the practice.

The Committee argued that while the previous Universities Minister, Jo Johnson, had stated that the higher education funding system was delivering its core policy

objectives, one of which was to "fairly share costs between the general taxpayer and the individual student", the fairness of the funding split was subjective. It recommended that the Government should instead aim to achieve a split that was economically optimal, although it was not clear how large a range of funding splits the Government would consider optimal, given that the split had swung by 10–12 percentage points since the new repayment threshold had been introduced.

The Committee welcomed the Government's planned major review of student financing and university funding, although it regretted that Jo Johnson had effectively ruled out "radical change to the core architecture of the student loan system" in his oral evidence. The Committee therefore hoped that the new Minister for Higher Education, Sam Gyimah, would approach the review with an open mind. In his evidence to the Committee, Lord Willetts had argued for a five-year review in which the parameters of the student loan system would be openly considered. The Committee agreed that there was merit in the proposal, not least for greater transparency. The Committee recommended that as part of its major review, the Government should analyse the benefits and drawbacks associated with introducing a pre-defined periodic review of student loan terms, and it should take account of the thoughts of students when considering the merit of the proposal.

The Committee saw no justification for using RPI to calculate student loan interest rates as it was no longer a National Statistic and it had been widely discredited. In its Autumn Budget the Government had acknowledged that the use of RPI was unfair for business rates, and the Committee had ben unconvinced by the case put forward for its use by the then Minister, in line with the Committee's report on the Autumn Budget. The Committee urged the Government to abandon the use of RPI in favour of CPI to calculate student loan interest rates. The Committee recognised the importance of preventing student loans being taken out to be invested, and it agreed that the interest rate should seek to prevent it. However, given that tuition fee loans, which made up significantly more than half of an average student's stock of debt on graduation, were paid by the Student Loans Company directly to the university, the Committee argued that there was little justification for applying high interest rates to the tuition fee element of student loans while students were studying.

While the Government had justified the existing level

and structure of interest rates on student loans on the grounds that it was progressive, the Committee argued that in reality, the student loan system had complex redistributive effects that were not strictly progressive. It pointed out that high-flying lawyers would generally pay less than teachers; but both would pay more than a graduate who did not receive a pay premium from their time in higher education.

Is there a market in higher education?

In implementing the 2012 reforms, contrary to the recommendations of the Browne Review, the then Coalition Government had chosen to introduce a cap on tuition fees. The evidence provided to the Committee suggested that the decision had been taken in the knowledge that it would create a market with no meaningful price competition. It added that whether price competition in the higher education sector could ever be a realistic or desirable prospect, even without a tuition fee cap, was debatable and the incentives for students to choose courses that commanded smaller tuition fees were weak. Nevertheless, the Coalition Government's expectation in advance of the 2012 reforms had been that competition from new market entrants, combined with additional obligations for those universities that chose to charge above £6,000, would lead to prevailing tuition fees of around £7,500. The Committee stressed that it was overwhelmingly clear that the assumption had been a naïve, given that fees were almost universally well in excess of the level the Government had intended when introducing the new fee regime. The Committee recommended that in its expected review, the Government should explain, and explore why the higher rate of fees being charged was desirable.

While the current structure of the higher education market created financial incentives for universities to recruit more students, the NAO had found that market incentives to achieve such expansion by improving course quality were weak. The Committee argued that it was wrong to assume that the competition to recruit more students would be played out through competing on the basis of quality, and if pursued recklessly, the aim of attracting ever greater student numbers could be damaging. The fact that university spending on marketing was increasing showed that universities could compete in ways that did not deliver any educational improvements. The Committee warned that the market

mechanisms that the Government had applied to the sector would not be sufficient to drive meaningful improvements in quality. The Committee noted that the Office for Students would be tasked with developing the Teaching Excellence Framework further by taking it to subject level. It added that while such a step would be sensible, the fear was that the Government's efforts may be wasted if it failed to address the fact that so few students were currently making use of information that was already available.

Issues for students

In conducting its major review of university funding and student financing, the Committee urged the Government to be mindful of the risk that additional changes would only lead to more confusion. The Committee recommended that the Government should take the opportunity to simplify the system and significantly improve how it was explained. The Committee was concerned by the thought of prospective students choosing not to enter higher education due to misperceptions about the nature of student loan debt, and the Loan statements sent by the Student Loans Company were likely to have reinforced the troubling misconception, would need to be improved to better convey the true nature of student loan repayments.

The Committee pointed out that maintenance loans were equally, if not more, difficult than tuition fees for prospective students to understand, and there had been mixed messages that maintenance loans were not intended to cover a student's living costs in their entirety, but that the Government was not being prescriptive about an expected parental contribution. The Committee argued that the former Minister's assertion that the Government did not assume that parents would contribute to living costs had been directly contradicted by official Student Loans Company documentation, which had stated that depending on their income, parents may have to contribute towards the living costs of their student children. The Committee warned that assumed parental contribution would undoubtedly create financial pressure for households with multiple children at university, and it had been unconvinced that the maintenance loan system had adequately accounts for that.

The Committee recommended that the fact that parents were expected to contribute to living costs must be made much more explicit. It added that alternatively, if the Government maintained that it did not expect a parental contribution, Student

Loans Company documentation must be corrected, and the Government must explain how university was free at the point of use for students without additional sources of income.

The Committee stressed that vital need for well informed public debate on the issue of maintenance loans, and it noted that regrettable, the Government had yet to publish the 2014–15 Student Income and Expenditure Survey, which would be highly informative in helping the public to understand students' financial circumstances. As the survey's findings was no doubt diminishing with the passage of time, the Committee recommended that the information should be published urgently. The need for maintenance grants to be reintroduced had been highlighted to the Committee, and it recommended that the Government should assess the case for doing so as part of its major review. The Committee agreed that the sharp decline in part-time student numbers, which had been brought about in part by the 2012 reforms, was regrettable. It added that the Government had failed to anticipate the impact the 2012 reforms would have on part-time students. The Committee recommended that the Government's major review of student financing and university funding should include a fundamental rethink of its offer to part-time students. It should ensure that part-time study was a credible option as part of lifelong learning and retraining, and that it provided access to higher education for those who were unable to study full-time.

The Committee also recognised the complexities associated with the task of introducing Sharia compliant loans and it recommended that the DfE should make use of Islamic Finance expertise both within Government and externally to ensure an alternative student finance model was introduced as soon as possible. The Committee said it was concerning that the Student Loans Company's inability to make use of readily available data had led thousands of graduates to overpay their student loans. While the Committee noted the Government's commitment to tackling the problem in the 2017 Autumn Budget, it questioned whether the April 2019 deadline for completing the work was ambitious enough. HMRC had told the Committee that although it could perform the administration of student loans, it would need additional capacity in order to do so. The Committee recommended that the Government's major review should consider the case for transferring responsibility for the administration of student loans to HMRC, along with a commensurate increase in resource.

Learndirect Ltd

The Monitoring, Inspection and Funding of Learndirect Ltd, the Public Accounts Committee, 22nd Report of the Session 2017-19, HC 646, published by the authority of the House of Commons on 2 March 2018.

In its report on the monitoring, inspection and funding of Learndirect, the Public Accounts Committee called for action in the wake of apparent special treatment that had been given to an "inadequate" further education provider. The Committee stressed that the failure of Learndirect in delivering quality training to apprentices whilst receiving millions of pounds of taxpayers' money, £121 million in the 2016/17 academic year alone, was another stark example of a "poorly performing contractor and poor oversight by Government and its regulators". The Committee added that it had been yet another contractor with contracts across several Government Departments.

The report noted that while Learndirect Ltd's performance on apprenticeships had been in steep decline since 2013, it had failed to address its under-performance, and to act in the best interests of learners. The Committee pointed out that Ofsted had expressed concerns about Learndirect Ltd in spring 2015, but despite the fact that the company's 75,000 learners had made it the UK's largest commercial further education provider, Ofsted had decided not to inspect until November 2016. Even then, Ofsted had accepted the potential sale of part of the company as a reason to postpone its inspection, and it had only finally inspected in March 2017.

The report pointed out that when Learndirect Ltd had found that it had been rated as "inadequate", it had launched a legal challenge which had delayed publication of the inspection report. But the judge had ruled fully in Ofsted's favour, and the report had finally been published in August 2017.

The Committee said that although the Department for Education would normally have cancelled an "inadequate" provider's contract and withdraw its funding almost immediately, Learndirect Ltd had threatened that such a course of action would harm its learners and jeopardise its ability to deliver other key government contracts.

The report pointed out that the company had continued to function, and it expected to receive over £105 million of funding from its main government contracts in 2017/18. The Committee argued that the apparent special treatment begged the question of whether Learndirect Ltd had been too big, and too important to government, to be allowed to fail. The Committee urged the Government to learn lessons from the failure of its contractors and, particularly where a company held contracts across several Departments, to ensure that it had a grip on how the companies were performing.

Commenting on the report, the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, Meg Hillier MP, said that while outsourcing was an abiding interest for the Committee, recent events had brought concerns about the Government's relationship with its contractors into sharp focus.

She said that in the case of Learndirect, thousands of learners had been let down amid poor oversight by Government and at significant public expense. Ms Hillier added that although there had been disruptive legal action and, finally, a scathing Ofsted report, Learndirect still appeared to be holding the whip hand, as it expected to receive over £105 million of funding from its main government contracts this year.

She argued that it could not be right that individual contractors should command such large sums of public money regardless of their performance and no commercial provider should be allowed to become so essential to the delivery of services that it could not be allowed to fail. Ms Hillier stressed that as the Government had a duty to manage taxpayers' exposure to risk diligently, the Committee urged it to act on the recommendations set out in the report, which included:

- The Government should learn the lessons from the failure of Learndirect Ltd, in particular concerning the need to understand how many government contracts a company held at a given time and how well it was performing against each of those contracts.

- The Department for Education and other government bodies should develop a framework for identifying any risk that a commercial provider that may become so large and essential to the delivery of public services that it could not be allowed to fail, or that it would require special treatment if it began to do so. The Cabinet Office should report back to the Committee on

progress with developing such a framework by the end of December 2018, and the Department for Education should do so separately by the start of the next academic year.

• ESFA should formally publish, in time for the next academic year, its expectations about the services that should be offered to subcontractors, and the associated management fees that were reasonable.

• Ofsted needed urgently to re-visit how it planned and prioritised its use of resources and the different type of risk attached to a private sector failure, in a way that would take account of risks to high numbers of learners and the changing provider-base in the further education sector.

• By June 2018, Ofsted should develop a specific deferral policy for commercial providers, to ensure that learners' interests would always take priority over the pursuit of profit.

The Social Mobility Commission

The Future of the Social Mobility Commission, The House of Commons Education Select Committee, Second Report of Session 2017–19. HC 866. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. Published by the Stationery Office Ltd on Tuesday 20 March 2018.

The House of Commons Education Committee report pointed out that as a body driven and informed by data and analysis, the Social Mobility Commission was well placed to produce social justice impact assessments for domestic policy. It felt that the impact assessments should not only be a means by which negative effects were flagged, but they should be used to help government to improve policy for the benefit of improving social justice.

The Committee recommended that the Commission should therefore be given specific power to publish social justice impact assessments on both policy and legislative proposals and the Government must ensure that the Commission was sufficiently resourced to be able to fulfil the additional functions. The Committee also recommended that the Commission should be empowered to give advice proactively to ministers on how to improve social justice in England, in addition to its duty to give advice to ministers on request.

The report stressed that the Commission's membership should not have been allowed to dwindle to the point that it had and the Committee recommended that the minimum membership of the Commission should be at least seven members in addition to the Chairman. The report pointed out that the Committee had been concerned to hear the chairman of the Commission's report of the "farcical" failed appointments process for the new Commissioners. The Committee urged the Government to ensure that future appointment processes would not follow the same "wholly unacceptable" pattern. It also recommended that the name of the Commission should be changed from the Social Mobility Commission to the Social Justice Commission.

The report stressed that an independent body reporting

from the outside of Government on the progress made on improving social justice should work in tandem with a body inside Government to coordinate action and implement solutions. It added that there needed to be clear communication between the two bodies to ensure that the implementation and coordination body was able to act effectively on the Commission's research.

The report argued that even the best monitoring and reporting on social mobility would be of limited value unless the outcomes of the reports and recommendations were acted upon. It pointed out that the combination of a strengthened Commission and a body at the heart of Government to drive forward recommendations would better demonstrate the Government's commitment to social mobility.

The Committee recommended that a minister in the Cabinet Office should be given specific responsibility for leading cross-government work on social mobility. It stressed that the minister should have responsibility for a dedicated unit with a remit to tackle social injustice, provide vital coordination across Government and ensure effective implementation of ways to increase social mobility. The Committee added that the body would also be the crucial reporting hub for the Commission to report into Government.

Brexit, Science and Innovation

Brexit, Science and Innovation, the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, second report of the Session 2017/19. HC 705. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. Published by authority of the House of Commons, Wednesday 21 March 2018.

The report notes that UK science is entering the Brexit process from a strong starting position. It quotes the Government's Future Partnership paper as saying that the UK is home to four of the world's top ten universities, and has more Nobel Laureates than any country outside the United States. The UK is second only to Germany in EU project participation, and assurances have been provided about participation in Horizon 2020, the EU's current flagship research programme.

The Government has made science a key pillar of its Industrial Strategy, and has made announcements about EU student places up to 2019. The Government's £4.7 billion increase to the UK's research and development budget by 2020/21 represents the biggest increase in public R&D investment since 1979, and the Government has made a commitment to increase R&D spending further as a proportion of GDP to 2.4% by 2027.

The Committee believes that co-operation on science and innovation is widely regarded as a 'win-win' for both the UK and the EU. Securing an early agreement on science and innovation would set a positive tone for other elements of the negotiations, but the Committee believes that the Government needs to act swiftly. The report notes: "It cannot be taken for granted that the UK will retain its status as a science superpower. We welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to agreeing a science and innovation 'pact', but we are concerned that if there were to be a protracted delay in agreeing this, it would have unfortunate effects."

Given the significance of science and innovation to the UK economy, the Committee believes that reaching an agreement on this should now be as important to the Government as addressing the question of security. The report concludes: "It must be stripped out from the wider trade negotiations for focused attention, rather than become a knock-

on consequence of other negotiations or be traded against other aspects of a post-Brexit deal. We do not accept that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed' in this context. We recommend that the Government make drafting and negotiating a science and innovation agreement an urgent priority."

In particular, the Committee expressed concern about the importance of international faculty and researchers. The report states: "It is not sufficient for the Government to wait until September for the Migration Advisory Committee to report before Ministers address the 'people' aspects of the UK's future science and innovation relationship with the EU.

"The Migration Advisory Committee is due to report in September 2018, but this would result in current uncertainties continuing for another six months. This issue must be resolved as quickly as possible. The Government should ask the Migration Advisory Committee to bring forward its conclusions in relation to the immigration arrangements needed to support science and innovation, and build these into a science and innovation agreement with the EU by October 2018, or earlier if possible."

Since the Referendum, the Government has given assurances to EU students entering UK universities in 2017 and 2018 that they would not see a change in their circumstances. Given that many universities will soon need to start distributing information to potential students about 2019 entrance procedures, the Committee believes that it would be helpful if the Government could clarify the status of 2019 applicants as soon as possible. The report states: "We are concerned that if such a people-centred science and innovation pact is negotiated later it risks being less comprehensive due to other negotiation priorities of the wider post-Brexit trade deal. Furthermore, if a pact is not agreed in late 2018, this will increase risks to retaining and attracting essential talent that our science and innovation sectors need."

The report notes that the Government has avoided openly committing to negotiating 'associated country' status for the EU research and innovation successor programme to Horizon 2020. "This uncertainty risks having a direct and imminent impact since, in some areas, funding bids for the successor programme will start to be developed in the coming weeks, and researchers and businesses need to know what the UK's intentions are.

"With just one year remaining until Brexit, and a

commonly-accepted aim of reaching a comprehensive Brexit deal by this autumn, the time for setting out broad aspirations has passed. The Government must now work quickly to secure a detailed agreement covering all of the issues important to science and innovation. With sufficient political will these problems can be overcome, but action must be taken now."

Academy Schools' Finances

Academy Schools' Finances, Public Accounts Committee, 30th report of Session 2017/19, HC 760. Published by authority of the House of Commons on 30 March 2018.

The report notes that academy trusts are educating increasing numbers of children and handling large amounts of public money. It concludes that the cost to pupils and the taxpayer of failure are particularly high for multi-academy trusts. The PAC regards it as crucial that they show the highest standards of governance, accountability and financial management.

The PAC felt that too often academy trusts are falling short of these standards and the Department for Education was "too slow to react". The publication of the first Academy Sector Annual Report and Accounts was "a welcome step forward in improving transparency and accountability in the sector". Yet, as the PAC noted, the report was not published until nearly fourteen months after the end of academies' financial year. The PAC recommended that the DfE should make the Annual Report and Accounts more timely so that it can be used more effectively by stakeholders, including Parliament and parents, to hold the Department and academy trusts to account.

The PAC concluded that the DfE's rules around related party transactions were "too weak to prevent abuse". During the year ending 31 August 2016, 40% of academy trusts engaged in related party transactions, worth a total of £120 million. The DfE told the Committee that related party transactions could be beneficial to academy trusts, for example, where a trustee provides goods and services free or at a reduced cost. The PAC was not convinced that this is always the case. The DfE requires that the price paid by the academy trust should only cover the cost of providing the service and it explicitly prohibits instances where related party transactions are carried out for profit. However, working out what constitutes the cost of providing a service can be complex and open to manipulation. It is therefore difficult to prove that a related party transaction for services is not "at cost". The report concludes: "We are concerned that the rules are difficult to police, as the Department's processes are not robust enough to prevent

abuse and that such abuses only come to light after the fact, often as a result of the year-end audit, or whistle blowing. These arrangements between academy trusts and related parties should arise by exception, rather than with the current frequency". The report therefore recommends that, to prevent abuse, the Department should tighten the rules in the next version of the Academies Financial Handbook, expected in July 2018, to prevent academies from entering into related party transactions without approval from ESFA.

The report states that "the accounts would better support transparency and accountability if they included more detailed analysis". In particular, the accounts do not currently contain comparative analysis of the performance of trusts of different sizes or geographical locations. The report states that "such analysis, along with comparators and benchmarks, would make it easier to assess performance across the academy sector." The information that is currently available on the relative performance of academy trusts is not sufficient.

The report concluded that some academy trusts "appear to be using public money to pay excessive salaries". The Annual Report and Accounts showed that there were 102 instances of trustees being paid salaries which were excess of £150,000 in 2015–16. In November 2017, ESFA wrote to 29 single academy trusts where a Trustee was paid in excess of £150,000, requesting justification for these significant salaries. ESFA has received responses from all 29 trusts, but in two thirds of the cases is not yet satisfied with the trust's response.

The report concludes that "unjustifiably high salaries use public money that could be better spent on improving children's education and supporting frontline teaching staff, and do not represent value for money." The Committee feared that if the payment of such high salaries remains unchallenged, it is more likely that such high salaries become accepted as indicative of the market rate. The PAC recommended that the DfE "should extend its work to challenge all academy trusts that are paying excessive salaries and take action where these cannot be justified".

The PAC concluded that with the growing financial pressures on schools, the DfE was not doing enough to identify academy trusts that are at risk of getting into financial difficulty. The Annual Report and Accounts show that 165 (5.5%) of trusts were in deficit in August 2016, the latest date for which data is publicly available. ESFA told the PAC that "it is confident that it

has an up-to-date picture of schools facing financial difficulties, based on its review of academy trusts' accounts and budget forecasts".

It also carries out risk assessments designed to identify trusts at risk of financial difficulties. Yet despite this assurance, the PAC was concerned that the DfE could not tell it how many trusts were currently in deficit, and that it did not expect to have this information until October 2018. The report stated: "This uncertainty, and the lack of up to date information, does not instil confidence in the effectiveness of ESFA's financial monitoring and its timely intervention to support schools at risk of getting into financial difficulty." The PAC recommended that the DfE should, by the end of June 2018, write to the Committee with details of its progress in improving how it identifies, and intervenes with, academy trusts at risk of financial difficulty.

The PAC was concerned that the DfE could not clearly explain how it protects schools' funds and assets when a multi-academy trust fails. In July 2016, 3,636 (63%) academies were part of a multi-academy trust running more than one school. The DfE saw no issue in principle with individual trusts running a large number of academies, but acknowledged that in the past academy trusts had been allowed to grow too big too fast.
The Committee asked the DfE whether schools which had transferred a surplus to multi-academy trust upon becoming an academy would get their money back if the trust was to fail. "The Department was unable to explain on what basis funds and assets were allocated between schools when a trust failed."
The Committee was concerned about the impact of the failure of a trust on pupils as the consequences are more severe and the solutions more challenging than when a single school fails.
The PAC recommended that the DfE should write to the Committee by the end of June 2018 with details of how funds and assets will be protected and redistributed when schools transfer to another academy trust after one has failed. "The Department needs to develop a risk strategy for how to tackle multi-academy trust failure."

The PAC was concerned about asbestos in schools. It concluded that the DfE "does not have enough information about the extent of asbestos in schools to ensure that the risks are being properly managed". In April 2017, the PAC found that the DfE did not have a complete picture of the extent of asbestos in school buildings in general. The Department's first

property data survey did not assess the extent of asbestos. Only a quarter of schools responded to its second survey, in 2016, which aimed to collect data on this issue. The Committee recommended that the DfE should set out a plan by December 2017 for how it would fill gaps in its knowledge about the school estate in areas not covered by the property data survey. The Committee recommended that the DfE should publish the results of its ongoing exercise to collect data on asbestos and make clear to Local Authorities and academy trusts that information should be made available by the end of June 2018.

Mental Health

The Government's Green Paper on mental health: failing a generation, First Joint Report of the Education and Health and Social Care Committees of Session 2017–19, Third Report of the Education Committee of Session 2017–19, Sixth Report of the Health and Social Care Committee of Session 2017–19. Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report. HC 642. Published on 9 May 2018. Downloadable from https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhealth/642/642.pdf

This select committee report has reignited the debate about the state of provision for young people with mental health needs, and has been widely welcomed across the sectors of education and health that deal with children. The committees welcome the publication of the Green Paper and its "direction of travel", but thereafter they are highly critical of its contents. While they acknowledge that the main proposals of the Green Paper, to follow a 'three pillar' strategy with a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health in every school and college, new Mental Health Support Teams linked to groups of schools and colleges, and trials of a four-week waiting time for access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are not without merit in principle, it is the slow speed of implementation that the committees find unacceptable.

The committees were disappointed that the recommendations of their predecessors' report have not been fully taken into account. The report said: "The Government's strategy lacks ambition and will provide no help to the majority of those children who desperately need it. The narrow scope does not take several vulnerable groups into account, and the proposals put significant pressure on the teaching workforce without guaranteeing sufficient resources. There is also little or no attention to prevention or early intervention. The suggested speed of delivery will leave hundreds of thousands of children with no improvements in provision for several years and with possibly worsened provision if staff leave to join trailblazer areas elsewhere."

The report echoed concerns from those in the sector that the Green Paper does not adequately connect to other

relevant policies, for example opportunity areas and social mobility, and misses opportunities to address fragmented services. The Government was "tinkering" rather than using the opportunity to "truly transform" the system. "We want to see more evidence that the changes proposed in the Green Paper will join up services in a way that places children and young people at the heart of the strategy."

Other concerns the report echoed were:

• The potential adverse effects of the current exam and testing system on young people's mental health.
• The lack of action on addressing the transition to adult mental health services.
• The lack of commitment to specific action to address the higher level of need in particular demographic groups, including looked-after children, those in the criminal justice system, those who are in alternative provision and/or off-rolled, and those not in education, employment or training (NEETs).
• The impact of social media on young people's mental health.
• The lack of specific action for apprentices and further education.
• Whether the proposed trailblazer approach may inadvertently lead to increased inequality in service provision.
• The lack of detail about the training provided for Designated Senior Leads for Mental Health and the voluntary nature of the role.
• The capacity and capability of the health and education workforce to meet the additional demands of the Green Paper proposals.
• The availability of prevalence data to support service development and monitoring.
• Data sharing between health, social care and education services.
• Issues of accountability regarding service provision and funding.

The long timeframes involved in the strategy were also of great concern to the committees.

Social Mobility Commission

Government Response to the Education Select Committee Report into the Future of the Social Mobility Commission, Department of Education, Cm 9619, 23 May 2018.

The Government welcomed the Education Select Committee's recognition of the importance of the Social Mobility Commission's role, outlined in the Committee's report, The Future of the Social Mobility Commission, published on 22 March 2018. The Government said it was "committed to improving social mobility and see the Commission as a vital partner in this work. We value the wide-ranging work carried out by the Commission, including their research programme, their State of the Nation annual reports and both the Social Mobility Index and the Social Mobility Employer Index, which has been invaluable in keeping a focus on social mobility across government, business and wider society."

The Department for Education said that social mobility was a cross-government priority. The Government's Industrial Strategy, published in November, identified a plan to boost prosperity and productivity by focusing on places and people. The Government also claimed that it was boosting salaries through the introduction of the National Living Wage, creating more full-time, permanent jobs, and investing in affordable housing. "Taken together," the report said, "this will not just change individual lives, it will help transform our country into a fairer society."

In December 2017, the Department for Education published Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential which set out the Department's plan for improving social mobility through education. The plan set out five ambitions which cover the key life stages of people's education. These ambitions were:

- No community left behind.
- Close the 'word gap' in early years.
- Close the attainment gap in school while continuing to raise standards for all.
- High quality post-16 choices for all young people.
- Everyone achieving their potential in rewarding careers.

The Government's response document announced the

appointment of Dame Martina Milburn as its preferred candidate for chairman of the Social Mobility Commission. She is the Chief Executive of the Prince's Trust.

In its report the Education Committee had said that it viewed the Commission, as a body driven and informed by data and analysis, to be well placed to produce social justice impact assessments for domestic policy. It recommended that the Commission should be given specific power to publish social justice impact assessments on both policy and legislative proposals. It concluded that "the Government must ensure that the Commission is sufficiently resourced to be able to fulfil these additional functions." It also recommended that the Commission be empowered to give advice proactively to Ministers on how to improve social justice in England, in addition to its duty to give advice to Ministers on request.

The Government welcomed the importance the Committee had placed on social justice, "as we believe that you cannot have social mobility without it". The Department stated that the Commission was able to advise on a range of issues relevant to both social mobility and social justice. It hoped that the Commission would continue to work on important issues that affect social justice and the world of work. Yet the Department did not believe that the Commission needed to be given specific powers to publish social justice impact assessments or to proactively give advice to Ministers. The DfE believes "that departments themselves are best placed to consider the impact of policy and legislative proposals on social justice, as they are the experts on their policy areas." The DfE pointed out that the public sector Equality Duty already requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

The best the DfE could do was hope that once the new chairman was in place, it would be "keen to consider how we can best use existing powers to ask the Commission to provide advice to Ministers on specific topics. We are particularly keen to use this power to request advice on issues relating to social justice." The DfE said that it wanted to "reassure the Committee" that it was committed to "sufficiently resourcing the Commission to carry out its functions effectively and we look forward to working with the new Chair to develop an ambitious agenda."

The Education Committee thought that the Commission's membership should not have been allowed "to dwindle to the point that it did" and recommended that the minimum membership of the Commission should be at least seven members in addition to the chairman. In its report the Committee said that it was "concerned to hear Mr Milburn's report of the 'farcical' failed appointments process for the new Commissioners. The Government must ensure that future appointment processes do not follow the pattern of this process, which was wholly unacceptable."

The DfE admitted that the Commission's membership previously fell to a lower level than it should have. As for the number of commissioners, all the DfE would say was that it was "committed to appointing a sufficient number of high quality Commissioners to enable the Social Mobility Commission to carry out its functions effectively".

The Select Committee had recommended that the name of the Commission be changed from the Social Mobility Commission to the Social Justice Commission. While accepting the importance of social justice, the DfE did not agree that there should be a change of name.

The Select Committee had recommended that a Minister in the Cabinet Office be given specific responsibility for leading cross-government work on social mobility. The Minister should have responsibility for a dedicated unit with a remit to tackle social injustice, provide coordination across Government and ensure effective implementation of ways to increase social mobility. "The body would also be the crucial reporting hub for the Commission to report into Government."

In a long-winded response, the DfE replied that it did not accept the Committee's recommendation and that it, the Department for Education, and the most junior minister in that department, were the best placed people to take responsibility for social mobility. It accepted that social mobility cut across government departments, but stated that the Government already regarded it as a cross-cutting issue with a cross-government priority.

The Higher Education Market

The Higher Education Market, Public Accounts Committee, 45th report of Session 2017/19, HC 693. Published on Friday 15 June 2018.

The Public Accounts Committee pointed out that while the Department treated the higher education sector as a market, it was not a market that was working in the interests of students or taxpayers. The report argued that although there was greater competition for students between higher education providers, there was no evidence that the situation would improve the quality of the education they provided.

The Committee noted that higher education providers had increased their marketing budgets to attract students rather than competing by charging different tuition fees. However, because the amount of funding for higher education (primarily via tuition fees) had increased by 50% since 2007/08, the higher education market would need to deliver value for money, both for individual students and the taxpayer. The report warned that although the new sector regulator, the OfS, had a primary objective that students should "receive value for money", neither the OfS nor the Department had articulated well enough what value for money meant in higher education, or how they would seek to monitor and improve it. The Committee recommended that the Department should write to the committee by October 2018 to explain what it expects a successful higher education market to look like.

The report also concluded that young people were not being properly supported in making decisions on higher education, due in large to "insufficient and inconsistent careers advice." The Committee pointed out that the substantial financial commitment required and wide variation in outcomes from higher education meant that prospective students needed high-quality advice and support to make decisions that were right for them. However, the complexity of the market and the volume of information available made it difficult for prospective students, most of whom were teenagers, to assess the quality and suitability of higher education institutions, which questioned whether student choice alone would be able to drive up the quality of provision.

A wide range of other factors influenced students' decisions, such as marketing by higher education providers, the reputation of institutions and their perceived prestige, a student's family background, as well as the location and costs of travel and accommodation. The report stressed that critical importance of high-quality, impartial careers advice, but it argued that the support available to students in schools was not good enough. The Department had acknowledged that it needed to improve the quality of careers advice for young people and it told the Committee that its Careers Strategy, published in December 2017, would have a "real impact" on young people's lives and help students to make choices which would best fit their own aptitude, skills and preferences. But, the report stressed that it was not clear how or whether the Department would ensure high quality careers advice at school level. The Committee recommended that the Department should write to it by October 2018 with details of that progress that had been made with its careers strategy and the impact it was having.

The PAC felt that the Department did not have enough of a grip on actions to widen participation in higher education, and it was over-reliant on the actions of some universities. The Department's reforms had been designed in part to ensure equal access to higher education, regardless of a student's background. However, students from disadvantaged backgrounds were still far less likely to enter into higher education than those from more advantaged backgrounds. The report pointed out that there had also been substantial drops in part-time and lifelong learning, which were "critical to social mobility".

The Department told the Committee that it had introduced a Social Mobility Action Plan to address inequalities across the education system, and that one of the roles of the OfS would be to ensure best practice in reaching out to students from disadvantaged background was being applied across the higher education sector. However, the Committee was concerned that the incentives in the higher education market did not sufficiently support widening participation. Outreach activities were primarily conducted by universities and while there were areas of good practice, some universities who found it easy to recruit students were not pulling their weight.

The OfS told the Committee that each higher education provider would be set targets for widening participation and improving outcomes for disadvantaged groups, and that it

would also oversee the Access and Participation Plans, which would be a condition of registration. But the Committee felt that it remained to be seen whether the plans to improve performance would have an impact on the life chances for disadvantaged groups. The report recommended that the Department should provide it with evidence of how it was widening participation and opening higher education to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The report also called on the Department to demonstrate how it would maintain pressure on providers to measure success.

The report pointed out that students had limited means of redress if they were unhappy with the quality of their course, even if they dropped out. The relationship between students and higher education institutions had changed substantially since the introduction of tuition fees, and there was a much greater emphasis on whether a course or institution offered value for money. The report pointed out that while an effective market required empowered consumers who could switch provider if they were dissatisfied, that was not the case in the higher education market.

Across the sector, only 2% of students transferred provider each year, and students were more likely to drop-out altogether if they were dissatisfied with their course rather than switch provider. When students did switch providers or dropped out, they were unlikely to get any of their fees back unless they could demonstrate that they had been misled in some way. The report noted that OfS would require universities to demonstrate what arrangements they had in place for facilitating transfers, and it would have a responsibility to make sure that there was better use of transfers where appropriate.

However, given the relative weakness of students as consumers, the report stressed the need for the OfS to use its full powers actively, and work effectively with other regulators, such as the Advertising Standards Authority and the Competition and Markets Authority, to ensure that the market functioned in the interests of students. The Committee recommended that, in developing the new regulatory framework, the Department and OfS should ensure that students' interests were protected. It added that the OfS should include clear guidelines to enable students to shift courses or institutions more easily.

The report pointed out that the new Office for Students had not yet articulated how it would support the varied and

complex interests of students. It told the Committee that, as the sector regulator, its role was to regulate universities and colleges “on behalf of students”. However, the report concluded that such interests were varied, complex and often competing. The OfS also told the Committee that it had established a student panel, but it had chosen not to work with the National Union of Students, to inform how it made decisions and to ensure that its definition of the student interest was defined by students themselves. The OfS told the Committee that it planned to develop a student engagement strategy to clarify what the interests of students were so that it could feed them into its regulatory framework, which would include quality of teaching, feedback and graduate outcomes as key areas of focus. But the report argued that until the OfS had sufficient clarity over what it was trying to achieve in the interests of students, it would not be able to effectively monitor and evaluate the success of its regulatory approach. The Committee recommended that the Office for Students should report back in six months to set out in detail how it would measure and report on its performance in regulating for students and set out what its priorities were in protecting student interests.

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